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THE NEW TREASON OF THE INTELLECTUALS

Belotserkovsky's piece in this issue is deceptively modest. Though it makes no claim to a new theory of Soviet dissent, it seems to me to point to a revolutionary change in the role of intellectuals. For if Belotserkovsky is correct when he says that the true dissenters are the scientific not the literary intellectuals, this not only goes against all our notions of what is going on in Russia but it marks a break with the Western tradition of dissent, with our very idea of dissent. What it suggests is a reversal in a totalitarian society of the classic roles of the scientific and literary intelligentsia.

In our own society, in America and Europe, we tend to assume that intellectuals associated with the arts and the humanities take the lead in criticizing the government and the system, while those connected with the sciences are more neutral, less political, more involved with their own disciplines. Most literary people, for example, do not feel at home with the government; on the other hand, few of the soft or the hard scientists feel compromised when they are consulted or employed by the government. The reason for this split obviously has had much to do with the fact that the literary intellectuals have been more concerned with values and ideas, and with their relation to the rest of society. It is, in fact, the peculiar combination of thinking about existence as a whole while feeling outside the mainstream that has distinguished the modern sensibility.

Now it is startling to discover that the situation is just the opposite in the Soviet Union. But Belotserkovsky's analysis, which relates the intellectuals to the forces of Soviet society, makes their ambiguous position not only plausible but inevitable. We have been so accustomed to thinking of writers as outsiders we forget that Soviet writers, however critical or discontented with official restrictions, are really part of the intellectual and political elite. And the fact that they deal with language and ideas while subjected to all kinds of pressures as well as censorship must mean that they are constantly compromising.

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Indeed, one has only to look at the career of Yevtushenko to see how criticism and compromise have become indistinguishable.

The scientific intelligentsia, on the other hand, unlike scientists here, seem to represent, if only indirectly, the ideals of a free society. For one thing, they are not ideologically incriminated in the communist regime. But, in addition, the growth of science and industry in the Soviet Union constitutes a challenge to the regime, while in this country the relation to the system is much more complex and contradictory.

If in the West there seems to be an affinity between conscience and consciousness, the affinity in the Soviet Union is between false consciousness and bad conscience. And the Soviet equivalent of the critical mind in the West, which sees its purity in its disengagement from society, would appear to be that of the scientific mind, which is socially integrated but disengaged from ideology. It is most ironic that the end of ideology should serve conservative ends in America and radical ones in the Soviet Union.

It is also paradoxical that Benda's charge of treason against the intellectuals—for "bringing politics . . . into their activities as intellectuals"—should be most applicable to the Soviet Union today.

W.P.

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Norman Mailer

A PREFACE TO THE JOKER

I did not like this book twenty years ago, and thought it disappointing. Since I had learned as much about writing from the author as from anyone alive, large demands were put upon the manuscript. Jean Malaquais was not only my good friend, perhaps even my best friend, but my mentor, more—he had had more influence upon my mind than anyone I ever knew from the time we had gotten well acquainted while he was translating *The Naked and the Dead* into French. Part of the friendship rested on his candor. He is hardly rich now, and he was poor then, as only a French intellectual who teaches an evening course at the New School can be bread-crust poor in New York, and he made no pretense—he was not in love with *The Naked and the Dead*. No, he was doing the translation because he needed the work. It proved a munificent sum. The publisher was giving him $2,000, and in the course of the year, I added another $1,000 out of shame. I had never seen a man work so hard at a job for which he did not have respect. In the year it took him to make that translation, he must have worked eight hours a day, five or six days a week, he was a perfectionist and a French stylist, and hated my prose in that book with much detailed justice: he would draw vectors across the pages to show how sloppily I had repeated words, or worse, *ideas*—how he detested anything slovenly in literature! He had, after all, fashioned the style of his own French prose out of the hungriest inner disciplines. Like

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Conrad, he was Polish, and also began to learn the language in which he would write only after he was out of his adolescence. Conceive of such hungry disciplines when he was a young emigrant from Warsaw who worked in French mines and came to clarify the literature of his new tongue by spending fourteen hours a day in the Bibliothèque Nationàle in order to keep warm—it was cold on the winter streets of Paris in the years of the Depression—yes, learned his French by reading and writing in that library with all his imagination, ambitions and privations going into it, and took a post-graduate course in the hierarchical elegance of the tongue by being secretary to André Gide for a period, indeed met his future employer after composing a furious letter on the spur of reading a casual piece the author had done for a literary review.[1]

In those pages, Gide had written that he sometimes wondered if poverty might not have deepened his art. We can imagine the irony with which he would surround so direct a sentimentality. Malaquais, however, pulled up the barbarism and shook it in the air.[2] *You ought to get down on your knees and pray to that God you occasionally pretend to believe in that He has let you be a comfortable bourgeois so you can make your art*. Such was the note of his letter, a howl of ferocity torn right out of the bitterness of trying to write at the maximum of one's possible talents when there was no money in the pocket and no food in the belly. Gide wrote back to apologize. He confessed he had not been thinking of the situation of young writers like Malaquais for whom such words had to be naturally and justifiably intolerable, no, he feared he had been playing too inconsiderately with a conceit; he had wished to startle a number of his confreres who were overconcerned with their sensibility and so had been cushioning themselves too much against shock. He hoped to pose the possible stimulations of shock. But it had been unfeeling to ignore the situation

[1] I think it is worth printing Malaquais' corrections (by way of a recent letter) to a few of my biographical facts. "The library was la bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, the only one in Paris that stayed open till 10 p.m. I'd remain there all day long (10-12 hours), often without a meal. At closing time I'd go to les Halles where, with some luck, I'd be unloading crates of cackling poultry or frozen cabbage. Still, job or no job, I could always grab there an apple or a couple of carrots to keep the man alive."

[2] "Gide's piece, an excerpt from his *Journal* dated March 1935, appeared in the October issue of la Nouvelle Revue Francaise. I think it was December when I happened to read it. Had you a chance to look it up (cf. Justin O'Brien's transl., Knopf), I am sure you'd agree it was plain sentimental gibberish, and not in the least ironic, idiocy was the price one had to pay for going along—even for a while—with the Stalinists."

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of penniless young men like Malaquais and their sentiments on reading his words. To the letter, Gide pinned a bill, something like ten pre-World War II francs. Let us say the sum might bring back twenty dollars worth of groceries today. Malaquais tore up the money and mailed the scraps back to Gide. "Do not think," he wrote, "that you can buy a postage stamp for your soul. If you wish to do something for me, do something real, give me a job! Do not throw me crumbs!"

Now came another letter. Would Malaquais come and visit?[3]

"C'est toi, Malaquais?" asked Gide on the day he appeared.

"Oui, c'est moi. C'est toi, Gide?"

Could fifty years have gone by since a younger man had said "toi" to him? Still, it was the period of Gide's growing sympathy for the USSR. How characteristic to be intrigued therefore with a young Pole who was both an intellectual and a worker, not only a Marxist, but—perverse prize to esteem—a species of rare Marxist from some rarefied splinter group, the absolute antithesis, therefore, of all those Soviet bureaucrats with whom Gide was now trying to find tillable intellectual ground. All the more intoxicating to listen then to the concentrated polemic of a Marxist who was altogether anti-Soviet—that was in the grain for Gide. He could hardly move toward atheism without encouraging the friendship of every cleric he knew.

So began an intellectual relationship which would continue intermittently for years. If Gide was to absorb little of Marx from Malaquais (which may have been Gide's fault!) the new secretary was to learn a great deal about writing from the master.[4] A decade and a half later during the winter and spring of 1949 while Malaquais was translating *The Naked and the Dead* and we became friends despite his aforesaid abomination of my writing (with which I secretly agreed—

[3] "G. pinned to his letter a postal order for 100.00 francs (20.00 doll. is about right). I mailed it back, telling him he couldn't buy himself a piece of real estate in paradise at my expense. Not that I was beyond bribery. Had he sent 1.000.00 francs, I might have considered. But for 100.00 francs I'd rather have him stay in hell. That's when he wrote, would I come and visit."

[4] "I was not G's secretary or otherwise in his pay. He did ask me from time to time to do this or that for him—read and comment upon the hundreds of letters (mostly insulting) he had received as a sequel to his two books on Russia; or he'd want me to put some order in his voluminous archives; or call on me at any odd hour for a game of chess; or drag me along the streets through lengthy aimless errands; or drop in my lap a manuscript of his and out of the corners of his eyes watch me as I sniffed over it; and so on. But there was never a question of employment or salary. Yet, it is true that he gave me a helping hand. He had me examined by his doctor, saw to it that I put on a few badly needed pounds of flesh, that I be taken care of when in the hospital, in short possibly kept me from spitting my lungs. And he supported me intermittently when I was writing my first book, and it was he who secured for Galy and myself the Mexican visa which saved our hides."

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was I the first to think that *The Naked and the Dead* was a good novel in spite of its style?) I would be obliged in my turn to pick up Malaquais' literary precepts, live with them, wrestle with their intent, and even absorb one or two while hearing Gide's example cited so repeatedly during debates on style that I came to feel at last as if I knew him, or at least knew something of his taste and how his strictures were formed.

There was nothing slavish about Malaquais, least of all his mind. He was an intellectual sultan, still is, and so my ongoing education in the niceties of good writing was not a simple concert of homage to Gide—Malaquais had for his old employer the comfortable respect we offer a writer whose virtues are prominent but whose lacks are clear in our estimate. After any harangue by Malaquais designed to reduce my truculence toward elegance, severity, and restraint (which virtues were elevated through all of my friend's dialectic in order to purify the quality of *surprise* in one's work—a traditional Gallic presentation under the very shadow of the great literary chef, André G., himself), my mentor was also perfectly capable of saying in aside, "Of course when it comes to an analysis of history, Gide is like a school boy. He has every gift for seizing the paradox of a character—he is virtually the first to comprehend that character *is* paradox—but give him a social context and he will lose all instinct for the dialectic."

On reflection, it was true. Gide did not live with dialectic. His mind was singularly particular just where Malaquais' was marvelously abstract. Malaquais had the most powerful ability to move from any particular offered him into the Leviathan of his general theory—he was not a Marxist for nothing!—and trying to argue in his presence was analogous to being drawn with one's brain along a magnetic field of the intellect. Willynilly was one's mind reoriented along one Polish Frenchman's poles. Nothing vulgar or bullying about it. Malaquais loathed formula, propaganda, or any variety of thinking which deprived a situation of its nuance. So he was capable of advancing a new thesis, anticipating your objections, stating them with clarity (like Freud disarming his critics) and then would overtake his own verification of your position in the return swing of his dialectic. He would do this with such power that when he argued, the veins in his forehead would throb as though to demonstrate that the human head was obliged to be the natural site if not the very phallus of Mind. Malaquais

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would have at such times a remarkable resemblance to Picasso—the same noble vault of forehead and workingman's knob of a nose, same characterological determination of chin, same cleft. (Of course, Malaquais might detest the comparison. "What a stinker!" I heard him say once of Picasso.)[5] Still, speaking of genius, I heard Malaquais give a lecture once at the New School. I never heard a better one. For fifty minutes he spoke (without a note) exploring into the recesses of a novelist's unique relation to his time—memory across the years suggests the lecture may have been on Stendhal, or was it Proust?—I only remember the sensation of feeling my intelligence conducted through exercises I might not ordinarily have been able to follow. He had the same intense application of energy upon a given point that one finds only in those few great athletes who bring absolute concentration to every instant of a contest and so reveal to you by their body movement some meanings of the sport. When Malaquais lectured, it was inconceivable that his mind and tongue could separate. To cerebrate was to speak. Once at a party he went on for hours, dominated all conversation. When his wife later remonstrated, "Jean, you talked nine-tenths of the time," he grunted and said, "I had ten times as much to say." It was not arrogance. Merely his grim estimate of the proportions, grim because this small French Pole with his rugged face and mighty brow, his virile purchase on any question to come his way, this prodigy of debate, this behemoth of orality—he spoke out of the same gusto with which a good appetite devours steak—was a man locked in chains when it came to writing.

With no belief in karma, one might still have to postulate a phenomenon like reincarnation to explain the enormity of Malaquais' woes when he tried to write—only a soul paying in this life for outrages it had performed in another could pass through such suffering. So Malaquais may once have been Gilles de Rais. In the late Forties and early Fifties when Jean was writing *The Joker*, just those years when I first came to know him well, he would sit at his desk for ten or twelve or fourteen hours a day, every day. It was his boast that he would not get up, not pace around, not break for a meal, no, he would sit, contemplate his page, and would write . . . to the tune of two or three hundred words a day. Two hundred words in ten hours! It is twenty

[5] "Did I ever say of Picasso, 'What a stinker!'? If so, it must have been in relation to some concrete occasion, perhaps his drawing a 'dove of peace' in Stalin's honor."

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words an hour, or a new word every three minutes. Can any torture be more horrifically designed for a man who could deliver an extempore lecture complete in thought, example, and syntax, a work of seven or eight thousand words in less than an hour to be reduced now, down now, with a pen in his hand to twenty words in sixty minutes? The culture of the past must have sat on his mind like Gibraltar. How could he dare to write about anything? Given his profound contempt for authors who rushed to place their shoddy artifacts into that small temple where only a few perfect works ought to be installed, how presume to add to the excrementa? So this flame-thrower of a mind (when free at its own unrecorded speech) was now confined to one burning wire which sought to drill a tiny hole into the rock of his weighty regard for the value of literature. A man who sat twelve hours at his desk in meditation might have enjoyed such a life even with no more than two hundred words a day, but Malaquais like many an author before him, labored in depression and whole fatigue. "Yes," he said once, "if you want to do good work, you must *pisser le sang*," and he must have pissed the blood of every disappearing ambition into the hours he chained himself to that desk. What an effort! Over two years, then three years of just such work, slowly *The Joker* bored its little hole into the great rock of his resistance to himself, and Malaquais emerged at last with this novel.

2.

I was aghast when I read it. So much had happened in his life. He had escaped from the Germans after being a prisoner of war, then as a man without a passport had slipped out of Occupied France, only to become metamorphosized into a Jew again, obliged still to hide from the Nazis in Cadiz, while haunting visa factories like a character in *The Consul*, then a penniless emigre living by his wits in Venezuela and Mexico for the rest of the war. He had also been a movie-script writer with respectable credits and an award winner of a major literary prize, the Prix Rénaudot, as well as the post-war author of a major novel, *Planète Sans Visa*, and a much-lauded war diary, an ideologist, a romantic, a Marxist, a man with a charmingly demonic wife as well as a critic with every elevated instinct for the kill, he had now written a

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book so empty of the novelistic riches of his life, that I was in a fury as I read. I had wanted something I was not receiving. *The Joker* seemed bizarre and unloveable—a tract on the bureaucratic horrors of the future written in a nineteenth century style, an inconglomerate, an *incondominium* of Kafka, Alice in Wonderland, some TV afternoon laugh-snort, and Mission Impossible. I thought it indigestible; worse, some of the dialogue was guaranteed to grate your teeth. Perhaps it was the fault of the translation I suggested in desperation. No, it was a fine translation, Malaquais insisted. He had worked closely with the translator, a most intelligent woman.

What was one to do with passages like this?

> "I'm called Bomba," he said, "and she's called Kouka. What's your name?"
>
> I took his hand absent-mindedly and said nothing. He had a grip of iron.
>
> "You're a oner!" he said.
>
> A radio was blasting away on the mantel of a dummy fireplace. Mistress Kouka unstoppered one of my jars and plunged her nose into it with delight.
>
> "Oner, punner," she said.

No, Malaquais liked it fine. Nothing wrong with "You're a oner."

It was obvious this intellectual conquistador had no feeling for the little rhapsodies of the English tongue. I told him what I thought of his book—he had hardly been gentle in his earlier turn on *The Naked and the Dead* and *Barbary Shore* whose imperfections were left forever mortal to me by his critique. What unconscious anger must have been stored then in my own reactions; with what an unwitting hostility I must have gone through his pages. The recognition that Malaquais was not one of the world's greatest living writers exploded in me a critical response akin in judgement to a slave rebellion. Kill all the masters—slavery is built on the continuing existence of even a single one. I was obviously trying to forge my escape from all influence; Malaquais took it like a master. Indeed, it was his turn: if I had been one attentive student through every severity he visited on my work, so he absorbed everything I had to say on the faults of *The Joker*, listened with a half-smile on his face, that painful touch of merriment we feel when good

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friends are an abyss of agreement apart and shook his head gloomily from time to time as if it were all too possible that what I had to say might even be true.

Still he always recovered the private heat of that private and indispensable arrogance which had enabled him to drill the wire into the rock. No, he would always finish by saying, it was a modest book, and doubtless had its serious flaws; *quand même*, it had its irreducible little value—he thought finally there was something to it. That was to prove a small consolation in the face of his ongoing poverty, and the modest reception when it came out, its even more modest sale, hardcover for a couple of thousand and no paperback, its quick disappearance. Even in France where reviews were good, the book did little.

None of that could have offered him much, and in fact he has not published another novel over all these twenty years—perhaps we keep writing fiction until the pressure of everything in the scheme of things which does not desire novels squeezes us back. It could be said that civilization will enter hell when no more good novels are written and the hum of the TV set is the only resonance in our ear—certain enough, at any rate, a novelist feels that void of substance in his soul (which saints refer to as hell) about the time all urge to write a novel has deserted him. Just as it is the human fate to die, so it may be the novelist's fate to stop writing novels—it comes finally out of the baggage of disappointment in one's life, a species of cumulative nothingness, and Malaquais' fictional talents have indeed been silent.[6]

Still, it was also part of his character, part of the dignity of a master, that my intense dislike of *The Joker* never affected our friendship, in fact may have improved it, for in coming to revere him less and comprehend him a little more, I came also to understand that he was made of the noble material from which the best friendships are formed.

For he was utterly without rancor at my dislike of his work, and it was a soup of good marrow for any good friendship to know that the intensity of the critical standards he imposed on others was applicable to himself. Literary criticism had to exist for itself. That is what this

[6] He has published a book, *Kierkegaard: Faith and Paradox* which must surely be one of the most extraordinary studies ever done on the Dane. Unfortunately it has not been translated from French to English.

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good Marxist, full of his own paradox, proceeded to teach me: that there were more important things than vanity or self-expression. One of them was art. Critical standards were the pretorian guard of that most perishable majesty, art. It is, as an original insight, equal to the claim one has discovered the wheel, but then every artist may have to discover this wheel for himself, and I never knew another writer who was as impersonal about his own work and the work of others, friends or enemies, than Malaquais. If we are buddies we must naturally be ready to die for one another on the barricade was his unspoken premise, but do not ever ask me to approve of a literary performance I cannot respect. Could anything be less American than to be ready to die for friends if they do not agree with you? No, it is European, and if that part of Europe is also being covered over by the One World technologies of Global Village, well, the elegiac tone is always dependably at hand for a preface.

3.

But there is no need for elegy. I discovered on reading *The Joker* once again that it was more alive than when created. A string of book reviewer's good words might follow—characters vivid, action more significant—the difference was that I now enjoyed reading it. Now, on the other side of two decades, I could discover what there was to learn. For Malaquais had done a book which came out twenty years too soon, a novel about a world we are now all but ready to perceive on the horizon, that awful world of high-rise, unisex, computers, and disembodied flamboyance, everybody his own superstar, while the air smells of plastic whose molecules seem bound to circle forever in the coils of the air conditioning, all that stale gloom of tortured materials, deodorant and fluorescent light.

Yes, now, on re-reading, I came to see that Malaquais was writing of a city which was not so different from all the cities we have almost become, a megalopolis whose boundaries could not even be found. At one point, the hero, trying to describe his city through metaphor, sees it as an immense skyscraper large as the world itself for it is all the world he knows. It is a total state and the impact of that state is in the very architecture of its building.

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> in the same spirit of immunization, they surround themselves with walls, constantly reinforced; already, counting from the outer to the inner wall, the thickness has grown from simple to double and even to triple, which, you can well imagine, cannot but increase the general crowding. True, the horizontal space taken up by these reinforcements is partially compensated for by vertical space, since new stories are constantly being added to the tops of the buildings; but it is likewise true that this pushing upward cancels out at the top whatever attempts are made to reinforce the structure at the bottom.

The image could serve as a metaphor of capitalism itself, that Marxist view of capitalism in the final stages where every attempt to solve a problem creates a new and worse one, but this is hardly the author's first intent. He is more absorbed to write of bureaucracy, of a bureaucracy which is established, old, almost in a neo-civilized tradition, a Soviet bureaucracy is what we will think of first, yet not as it was in the early Fifties. The irony is that the Soviet has probably grown by these years of the Seventies a little closer in spirit to the model Malaquais provided for the Fifties.

So, as I read the book in the silence of all twenty years since last I looked at it, the work was different. It had its own resonance now. The faults may still have been there but they were less acute. If the dialogue once again leaned on the edge of the absurd, foreign, stilted—one stilt ever higher than the other—all the other absurdities seemed to have come into place. *The Joker* had its proportions. What looked bizarre in '53 was now on the side of prophecy. I could recollect my indignation when the hero, Pierre Javelin, at the end of the work confessed to a friend that he was writing poems and leaving them in odd places for people to read. What a puny way to resist the absolute totalitarianism of the city through which he traveled; what a sentimental orgy! Yet the first new sound to be heard in the age of conformity was a reading of poetry. Out of San Francisco came a wind to tell us the Beat revolution was on its way. That revolution, for better or worse, and certain it can hardly be for worse (so soon as one recollects the intellectual paralysis of the Fifties) was a movement which took us through Black militancy and the campus rebellions, from Eisenhower precisely to Watergate. A new totalitarianism may now be on its way, and more pervasive—the computer will be the axis of the new ideology. Yet if the

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Twentieth Century moves toward apocalypse (a full-gauge remark in *The Joker* states: "only the utmost crowding of individual destinies corresponds to reality") then history may be accelerating through liberations and repressions which become progressively more intense until the totalitarianism of the future will not be lived out in uniform so much as suffered along the unconscious programs of the psyche; at such a time the rebellions to oppose it may first appear as no more than new arts of the absurd, or of any other activity able to disrupt the program without destroying itself.

Something has happened to our view of bureaucracy over these twenty years; and it is this change which shifts *The Joker* from an isolated little book into a poetic instrument which enables us to think again about the oncoming bureaucracies of the future. For it is in Malaquais' vision to comprehend bureaucracy not as a monolith but an organism, a beast, with habits and mating customs, hungers and fevers, and just as animals are separated from history, so too is the mythical bureaucracy he creates for us in *The Joker* all separated, a bureaucracy utterly out of time for it draws from so far back as the 19th century *paperasses* of the official French clerk and goes forward into projections of techniques the future has not yet envisaged. His bureaucratic villain Babitch is so simple, so French, so *clerical* as to cluck with delight at one point because finally,

> "This morning, just fancy, I was entrusted with the first ink of my career. . . . It's a new and most valuable promotion. And to think it comes so soon after the other. . . . I will admit that I still do not have an inkpot for my ink, but I believe it will not be long in coming now."

Yet Babitch is so devious, so skillful, so *tuned* to the opportunities of bureaucratic discourse that

> he didn't care in the least what I said so long as I kept talking. My agreement or disagreement made him equally happy. . . .
>
> "It's my turn to follow you perfectly," I said. "The true and the false, the myth and the real, alike incline the scales to your side. Your entire art is reduced to this simple procedure: say any word at all and I will have you hanged."

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Yet with what skill does the novel also inhabit all the here and now of government offices. Whoever has stood on line for an unemployment check is ready to appreciate the following passage:

> I found no way of explaining myself. What complicated things was that only the hands of the employee concerned were visible. A pane of bluish glass was at each of the windows, leaving an opening of only two inches at the counter, and it was through this that you saw the hands taking hold of your papers and manipulating them with fascinating dexterity. In addition, the glass reflected your image, which gave you the impression of talking to yourself.

Nor can anyone who has ever suffered through a search for their missing records and been maddened by the friendliness of an official who would help you if he could, but can't, fail to find the pertinence of this paragraph

> the poor inspector is caught between hammer and anvil. Yet he is in no way to blame. He is nobody. My case, for instance: barely ten minutes ago he had not even suspected its existence. There was not a comma in my record for which he was responsible; he did not even know who put in those commas. The records, once set going, circulated of their own accord, one neither knew where they came from nor where they were going to. . . . "So you see," he pleaded, "we are merely a stage of the proceedings, here, just a stage. The person involved and his record pause here a moment, we try to find out if they fit each other, as you fit a shoe to a foot, no more or less, then someone else takes over."

That is the middle ground of the marvelous anachronism Malaquais has mixed, bureaucracy past, present, and future—comic, maddening, then terrifying. For terror is the heart of his book. It is the terror of that future which passes beyond *Say any word at all and I will have you hanged* to the final oppression of that day when technology enters the brain, and the interface of all communication shifts from the voice to the thought. Then, totalitarianism may say, *Think, and you are gone*.

It is part of the complex strength of *The Joker* that this possible condition which inspires most of us with the imperative that of course

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we must resist (but leaves us spineless with the knowledge we have not a clue how to proceed) becomes instead the very action of the book, as if totalitarianism has been here so well perceived that we grapple with the beast, smell it, feel its depredations on our power to resist, and even begin to resist it. Some vision begins to move in one's mind, some grasp of the modern forms of despotism, some sense of that bureaucratic organism as a malignancy, an incubus upon our century which will finally, unlike all earlier historical forms of tyranny, end by destroying even its own. "The City rarely misses devouring its servants, and is it not, among your kind, the supreme form of belonging to have yourselves devoured?" For it is in Malaquais' vision that the total state does not strike at our liberties but rather is out to dissolve our identities.

> "Unfortunately we are strictly forbidden to reveal any address, under any pretext. No, sir, not even as an exception. Anyway, in this department we do not know the addresses of our subscribers. A special department takes charge of that, entirely independent of ours."
>
> "What department, madam? Perhaps by going there. . . ."
>
> "The Department of Archives, sir. But no one knows where it is."

If these bureaucrats will end by devouring one another, it is because they do not even possess the human if conspiratorial purpose to serve as tyrants, no, they form no master ring, but rather are agents of entropy who pull in all identity upon themselves (which is to say in upon the Program) until there is no identity left to dissolve but their own. "Dominique," says Javelin, "there is no individual fate in Hell."

So in Malaquais' story of a man who comes home to his anonymous apartment in an anonymous complex of high-rise buildings and finds that it is no longer anonymous because he cannot even find it nor find his wife nor his furniture, nor a lock for his key, we are brought into ironic contact with a modern epic, with what we may fear is the only modern epic—the simple search for that identity we all feel disappearing into some great maw of our century, into some almost palpable and most willful intent which seems to be forever engorging our roots and washing us faster away from any recognition of the past. It is Malaquais' vision to see that bureaucracy is not stupidity but a veritable system of evil genius.

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So he has written a book which is all but designed to be passed around as surreptitiously as the poems of the hero. Can one conceive of the impact of *The Joker* if copies were ever circulated hand to hand through the Soviet, there to give life to that undeclared enclave of resisters who read Solzhenitzyn and prepare to write more poems. Perhaps this edition will yet go slipping in. Let us hope we are not studying it in America fifty years from now like an artifact of hieroglyphs while the TV sets emptied of all content by the aesthetic strictures of the final domination merely drone their waves and clots into a stroboscopic sea and the hour of the wolf is in the neon of every used-up eternity on that drear dawn.

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STORIES

Ronald Sukenick

PALESTINE

Civilization comes down to a man staring at an empty page. Ravings. I have important practical things to do. I have to get my car fixed. I have to call my agent. Here in Israel we have no need of cars. Or of agents. Automobiles have long been exiled from the cities and towns where transportation depends on various beasts of burden camels burros oxen. There are even a few llamas to be seen and modern experiments are underway with giraffes and zebras which in fact antedate the use of the horse in Africa and the Middle East. We have an extensive intercity monorail system and colorful barges make their way among the canals. Environmental planning is largely given over to the artists with the result that the native beauty of the Holy Land has been preserved and even heightened. The prestige of novelists along with other artists is such that no intermediaries are needed between ourselves and the public and we have the means to produce and distribute our own work which is in constant demand. Artists are recognized as the creators not only of esthetic works but of reality itself all scholars scientists and rabbis are acknowledged as artists each working in his appropriate sphere even politics is considered to be a certain kind of art. I live in a kibbutz called The Wave. The Wave is situated beside the sea and our main ritual activity is surfing. Surfing is practiced by all the kibbutzim save the aged and infirm children begin to surf at the age of three or four and we have many octogenarians who are still active surfers. Surfing is of the nature of a sacrament for us it attunes us to the cosmos and gives every man and woman direct access to that union with

NOTE: Palestine is from *98.6*, a forthcoming novel.

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nature so sought after by the sages through the ages. Giving oneself up in harmony to the swelling wave is like returning to the bosom of our mother the sea. Surfing also keeps us in touch with the immateriality of the material for such is the nature of waves which move through the water and constantly leave it behind. Waves are also the nature of physical life whose cosmic energy moves through the material of the flesh and leaves it behind the scientific basis of these genetic rhythms has been expounded to us by our great microbiologist Dr. Frankenstein whose researches have unlocked the secrets of life itself. The kindly if eccentric Dr. Frankenstein who has taught us how to create ourselves in finer and finer harmony with the rhythms of the cosmos is universally regarded here in Israel as a father and a great sage indeed some regard him as a visitor from another part of the cosmos though he gently ridicules this notion certain of his eccentricities lend it a certain amount of credence in particular the strange appearance of his fingernails which are long and claw-like and painted in V shaped stripes of red white and blue and also his habit of breaking into an incomprehensible gibberish some say a higher language without warning or transition in the middle of a sentence. It is from Dr. Frankenstein that we learned the basic sexual nature of energy enabling us to eroticize all of our pursuits. Great slow waves of rhythmic energy while at the same time escaping that frantic sexuality which acts as a morbid irritant beyond the borders of Israel. The phone is ringing. I answer it a suave female voice tells me the President is on the wire it's Robert he wants me to visit him at the Western White House what he calls his heliocopter is already on the way. Before I know it I'm in the heliocopter a small trim machine skimming over the cliffy coast to Newport Beach a rich yacht suburb of the jet set halfway between Los Angeles and San Clemente it sets me down on the Presidential beach Robert is dressed in a bathing suit and earmuffs he's been surfing as we all do in Israel when something heavy is on our minds. A word about the earmuffs rumor has it that Robert is seen so often in his red earmuffs because they transmit messages from some occult source this is definitely not the case there is nothing weird involved except perhaps a kind of innocent vanity I'm happy to clear that up. Robert is troubled about sexuality he wants to know how we handle this matter in The Wave not so much on a personal basis you understand but on the level of policy and metaphysics. Of course I'm always glad to toss this kind of thing around

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with you but what particular aspect did you have in mind I say.

Robert fixes me with two dead blue clots of jelly Of course this is not for publication he says.

Of course.

We might begin with the question of jealousy.

That is at the heart of the matter as one might expect. Many researchers have tried to evade this problem but any results that do not include jealousy as one of the fundamental variables will be hopelessly jejeune. There is not one recorded instance where this did not have to be dealt with. Unless of course you eliminate feeling feeling of any kind and then you are well on the road to eliminating sexuality itself in fact we have developed an equation. L = P/J this is known as the Law of Inconstancy. Love equals passion divided by jealousy obviously a very unstable condition. Among its correlaries is that jealousy bears a positive relation to love the more the love the more the jealousy. The only way to escape this consequence is to deny the fundamental importance of sexuality itself and drift off into philosophical abstractions an option today reserved to only the most puerile theorists. Add to the Law of Inconstancy one the fact of differing interests between any given love partners and two a basic conflict of interest between the sexes and we begin to see the dimensions of the problem. Eve of course comes to Israel with me. We join the community of The Wave together as we have been together many years and whatever fluctuations in our relation made all major moves together. Between us there is much love and there is much pain it is not a glib relation. According to the Law of Inconstancy the love is not constant it comes and goes in rhythms in waves also the pain is not constant. Rebekah. Oh these suntanned softic Israeli girls let us not underestimate the sun. The sun is energy it works through the flesh it energizes it sensualizes it is as though the whole body were a genital. These suntanned girls running around The Wave always in their bikinis generous bodies. A whole generation of boys and girls generous to their bodies generous with their bodies generating great waves of sexuality the generous generation of course they're working through their own hangups I'm not aware of that yet. So Rebekah. Inevitable. The crest of a long wave I ride on till it breaks. At the same time great waves of pain between Eve and myself fights threats mutual hysterias. This cannot be evaded and there is no solution. No solution except the Law of Inconstancy L = P/J the greater the

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love the greater the jealousy therefore by definition the love is capable of containing the jealousy even as the wave of pain is breaking the wave of love is gathering. When a couple in The Wave becomes mature enough to understand the Law of Inconstancy they are considered to be ready for the marriage rite which we call Eating Newton's Apple. Eating Newton's Apple implies a passage from innocence to understanding it means that you are down to earth that you have your feet on the ground it means you are a serious person it refers to Newton's sudden comprehension of gravity when he saw the apple falling from the tree it's what we call the fortunate fall. There are very few couples that have eaten Newton's Apple. I have to admit that I haven't yet done so though I've had a few bites out of it. This is something most of us find hard to swallow I guess. Robert nods. I know that he not only understands what I'm saying but that he knows it before I say it that he is even perhaps putting it into my mind through telepathy since I know that I don't know it before I say it and don't know where it comes from. This thought is further borne out by Robert's next question which echoes exactly what is in my mind at that instant What about orgasm. What about orgasm this is precisely the central question the question on which our entire civilization stands or falls is it because of his Catholic background that Robert has a knack for these theological considerations. The tradition of the Scholastic Fathers accustomed to those minute theoretical distinctions which though absurd to the layman shaped the course of European history. There is a state known to scholars of the subject that they call Pure Horniness. Pure Horniness is a very dangerous condition. You think about Rebekah you forget about feeding the cat. You forget about Eve. The family the job the welfare of the community the whole thing cat and kibbutz. Probably you forget about your own well-being you even forget about Rebekah herself. Rebekah isn't the point you're just in this pure state that Rebekah isn't even enough to satisfy this is the PH Factor and there's nothing you can do about it except maybe fuck yourself to death. In The Wave we can see one another's auras there's something about the Holy Land conducive to seeing haloes all those old paintings. When the PH Factor is present in Rebekah her aura is a deep blue flare she's aflame she inflames others pretty soon the whole settlement is on fire. People want to die. They want to stop being people. They want to be meat they want to be things. You want Rebekah to be a thing. You

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don't want any personal considerations any sign of humanity enrages you makes you cruel you want to kill her. Pretty soon everything is shot to hell the energy released in this kind of spasm is enormous ecstatic and terrible. A transmutation occurs not unlike that in an atomic explosion the delicate balance of personal and social forces held in suspension that we call civilization explodes in a moment of frenzy rape cruelty murder and collapses into the lower level of organization characteristic of dead matter Hitler's Germany. Eros provokes Thanatos. Or so they say. It's fucking that opens Pandora's box. Orgasm is the first gasp the first gasp of insatiability that only ends by ending the unbearable tension between matter and spirit between life and death. In my relations with Rebekah there are three phases The Phase of Cruelty The Phase of Imagination The Phase of Illumination. In The Phase of Cruelty Rebekah is an idea an idea of which her breasts and buttocks are correlaries and her vagina the proof you might say a carnal idea that is an idea of carnality like a sexy ad a salacious photograph. She is an idea for me I am an idea for her. Ideas start in the head. They are analytic. They are discontinuous with the object. They are a priori in the sense that you lay them on the object she lays her idea on me I lay my idea on her the mode is rape. This is the empirical tradition mind rapes nature manipulation exploitation control. Inevitable. Incredibly erotic. Rebekah is a slave. Make me do things. Hurt me. My penis is a weapon. She submits to my power she comes like a string of firecrackers I have three orgasms at a shot we make love all day we're insatiable. It occurs to me we're looking for something the essence of meat. There is no essence of meat. That's why we're insatiable. That's Subphase One. Subphase Two is Fesselation. In Fesselation there is a great deal of oral play on both sides. There seems to be an idea abroad that sperm might be the essence or barring that that a carnal sacrament might be possible we might in some sense be able to eat one another the spirit is actually immanent in the body therefore etcetera. But despite our holiest perversions there is no real connection between one body and another. This is the matter. Discontinuity. Thus Subphase Three is inevitable. Sodomy. I keep her in a state of perpetual excitation satisfying myself between her buttocks. Since the closer we come to continuity the further we are driven from it the only way to achieve union is for one of us to in effect cease existing to become a pure object a thing ecstasies of sado-masochism ensue. Hurt me. Make me fuck

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dogs. I want to be a prostitute. I want to die. After coitus all men are sad. Naturally. With this kind of coitus. Let's move on. In this phase Rebekah's aura is a huge ragged flare a brush fire everyone feels it she turns everyone on we decide to hold open house a constant stream of men singly in large groups file through her legs the neighbors are beginning to complain one day we're making love I put my hands around her throat If you come I'm going to kill you I say she moans and starts to come my hands tighten next thing I know I'm in a new phase. That's the closest I'll ever come to murder. I'm in shock for three days. In the next phase we don't make love. We meditate. This is the Phase of Imagination. We contemplate one another's beauty we withdraw into ourselves I try to imagine what she feels like You know what Rebekah says one day.

What.

I don't know you.

Check. Tentatively gradually we start making love again only we don't go all the way we stop short of orgasm. We neck a lot and play around I feel like a kid again. We're using what we call The Rhythm Method in The Rhythm Method you try to sense your partner's rhythm you don't try to lay anything on her you get attuned it's like a new combo tuning up if you don't get the rhythm you don't make the love. You wait. You come to the point of orgasm and then withdraw you withdraw back into yourself you contain the energy instead of getting it off this fills you with a lot of energy the only trouble is it drives you crazy. All that energy instead of streaming out through your genitals detours back up into your head and presses against the top of your skull you feel like you're going to start levitating any minute this is a good time to eat Newton's Apple. If you don't fly off into the stratosphere at this point you become hyperconscious. You begin to see. When you begin to see you begin to cry. This happens to Rebekah and myself at exactly the same moment What's wrong I say.

What do you mean.

You're crying.

So are you.

How come.

I feel sorry for you. How come you.

Ditto. This is where The Rhythm Method gives way to The Wave Theory. Let's plot this on a graph get a piece of graph paper. Draw two

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waves Wave A cresting in the trough of Wave B Wave B cresting in the trough of Wave A. Now extend both waves across the graph paper as they advance the waves begin to coincide trough to crest the point of coincidence we call X. X equals the unknown. When two people's rhythms coincide perfectly we can't know what happens this is what we call love. Love is a state that we can't know we can only experience it but then experience is a form of knowledge is it not. True it is not abstract knowledge it is the initial form of knowledge but perhaps it is also the final form of knowledge. This is a possible correlary of The Wave Theory I must go down to the beach and think about this in any case let's push on. X equals the unknown. There are two things we can say about it first if a is the energy of A b of B and x of X then $x = a^2 \times b^2$ and that's a lot of energy second at point X all sorts of improbable connections between the two of you become luminously obvious this is The Phase of Illumination you may throw away the graph paper. In The Phase of Illumination orgasm is what I can only term a musical experience. In this phase we may say that after coitus all men laugh. Gently. The consequence of this kind of orgasm is harmony as opposed to the cacaphony inherent in the sado-masochistic type. Luminous Orgasm is an important objective in the teaching of the new science of Psychosynthesis. We can also determine according to the laws of Psychosynthesis from the number and quality of improbable connections that become luminously obvious between partners at the moment of Luminous Orgasm how long a given relation can harmoniously last. In the case of Rebekah and myself it is the length of one Luminous Orgasm our crests can coincide perfectly only once the perfect wave has come and is gone forever we know it immediately no hard feelings smiling we wave goodbye. You can talk all you want says Robert. But it all comes down to social justice and in practical terms that requires power. That's the only way out. Fear times anger equals power. What do you mean I say. I'm not against social justice I'll prove it. ANNOUNCEMENT. WILL EVERYBODY PLEASE CLOSE THIS BOOK AND WRITE OUT A CHECK FOR FIVE DOLLARS TO THE AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION. REPEAT. IT IS FORBIDDEN TO CONTINUE WITHOUT MAKING A CONTRIBUTION TO THE ACLU. Hurry up what's taking so long. Ah there you are can we proceed.

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Leonard Michaels

HELLO JACK

Jack phoned.

I said hello Jack.

He said he was going to the hospital.

I said all right I'll go with you.

I asked if I should phone his wife. They weren't living together.

He said he wanted me to know where he was. He didn't want me to do anything.

I said you're the boss. What's wrong? I made my voice little.

He yelled let's not talk about it. I'm in the hospital.

I said you said that you had to go to the hospital. Little words. Cheepee cheepee cheepee. His wife couldn't stand him. I knew plenty.

I said hello Jack and rushed to the hospital.

I had a bad foot. Every step was a wolf bite.

But Jack was in the hospital. He was the boss.

Jack phoned so I said hello taxi cab. He'd do the same for me. We were old friends from Novgorod. Nothing to think about.

Taxi. Taxi.

In the hospital I noticed everyone was dead. Then a nurse was walking. I yelled rooms rooms rooms.

She said she personally didn't build the hospital.

I said so where's Jack?

She said he was in a room with another man.

In a hall I was running.

I saw Jack. Compared to the other man Jack was Mr. Universe. What the Mongolians did to one grandmother the Germans did to the

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other. A blonde Chinese Jew. His wife hated him. She was from Budapest. I didn't say anything.

What's with that man I said. I limped to a chair and took the shoe off my bad foot. The other man was blankets up to a face the color of chicken fat. His eyes were sticking out like swords.

Jack said the man was recovering from pneumonia. I didn't say anything.

If you ask me that man finished recovering I said. I put my shoe on Jack's bed.

Jack said what's the matter with your foot?

Nothing I said.

The man heard us. He said virus.

My foot was sweating.

Jack said virus is different from plain pneumonia.

I rubbed my foot. Poo I said. Open a window.

Jack said don't do anything. It's not important.

I said how much are they paying you to stay here? It stinks is not important?

I hopped to the window in one shoe and asked the virus I'm opening the window.

His eyes didn't move. They looked like a sign: BE QUIET. BE QUIET. Two killers, shining, pushing. He said virus.

I asked him again I'm opening this window so it will stop stinking.

He said virus.

A little snow came in but you couldn't notice. Like feathers. Nothing. It melted on the radiator. The virus didn't complain. Only a maniac would complain. The virus looked up at the ceiling as if a movie was playing there. I looked too. I knew there was no movie on the ceiling but I looked. I was right. Jack was happier with the window open. Why not? He was a man with a friend. He began a speech why he was in the hospital.

He couldn't eat, he couldn't sleep. This. That. He fell down at work. In his stomach a pain. So his union sent him to the hospital.

Talk talk talk. I knew plenty.

I said I'm glad you want to talk.

He said is it wrong to talk?

I said tell me if what you have is serious and forgive me for laughing. A friend can laugh.

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He said you think it's not serious?

I said to you serious is to the world ridiculous. Sure an enemy wouldn't laugh. He doesn't care so he can care. You have no sense of proportion. I rubbed my foot.

The other man said virus.

Jack said nobody told him not to talk.

I said maybe you would like to sing.

He began to sing. Ya ya ya.

The man said virus.

Me too. Ya ya ya.

All of a sudden the virus pushes his blankets on the floor and gets out of bed. His gown was pinched in his behind. His legs were bones, his face green. Like a tomato. I thought he was a tomato not a virus. He walked out of the room.

We stopped singing.

I said he went to the toilet.

Jack said there is a toilet behind the door over there. He didn't go to the toilet.

I said how do you know? Maybe he doesn't like that toilet.

Jack said he didn't go to the toilet.

I said he'll be back in a minute. He went to another toilet because he didn't want us to hear him make a tinkle.

Jack said he didn't go to any toilet.

I said all right. Then he recovered. Why should he pay another penny? He recovered. Stop the clock. A motel is cheaper. I noticed I had a headache.

Jack gave me a face like Genghis Khan. A rock with eye slits. I could see the tomato was my fault. I could see it in the rock.

I said I know how it is Jack. You come in with trouble and they put you with a virus. Look at my foot. Is that sweat Jack? It's sweat believe me. Jack's wife hated him. A small skinny from night school. Hair and pimples.

She wasn't his type but she used to read to him from Goethe. He couldn't understand a word so they got married. When Jack had a hardon she would vomit. He called her The Stomach. He used to say I'm going home now to The Stomach. I knew plenty. I said what do you say about my foot?

He said he phoned me so I would walk on my rotten foot. Then he

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grabbed my shoe and went to the window. A guy like him makes life meaningless.

Jack I said it was a shoe. You should throw Goethe out the window. Maybe you're in the Mongolian mood to throw my other shoe out the window? I slapped it on his bed.

He threw it out the window.

How about this lamp I said.

Out the window.

These blankets you want to keep?

Out the window.

I said this is too big don't even look at it.

For a Chinese Jew the mattress was no trouble.

A nurse came in when I was pulling Jack's bed toward the window. She started hitting and scratching me. Jack knocked her down with a punch. I jumped on her face. Jack put his tongue in her wallet, then me, then we pushed the bed out the window.

We were singing ya ya ya when nurses and doctors from all over the hospital came in. Why not? How often do schmucks see a friendship?

I walked home without a shoe. Not one shoe. I begged myself to take a taxi. It's cold. It's snowing. Take a taxi. But I refused. No taxi. For proof I yelled taxi taxi. It stopped. Drive into a wall I said.

The driver looked at me. I made a Jack face. He picked up a wrench. I could see he was a maniac. I was standing without shoes and a maniac was coming with a wrench. He could hit me in the foot. When he pushed open the door another taxi knocked it off.

It figures I yelled. But he was hitting the other driver with the wrench. In the snow I ran away. You'll get pneumonia I said.

I said I hope it's a virus.

Then I saw a phone booth and called Jack's wife.

She said hello.

I recognized her voice because it was so little and quiet. That's how she always talked. Like a one year old.

I said hello Jack's wife?

She said yeah Jack's wife.

I said Jack is dead.

She said what who?

I said you're no good believe me. Eastside hospital.

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She was screaming with her little voice what who?

I didn't say anything. I said I'm hanging up. You think my foot isn't killing me? What do you care?

She screamed wait wait.

I said Jack's wife?

She screamed yeah yeah Jack's wife.

I said Jack's wife from Goethe?

She screamed yeah Jack's wife.

I said listen. Let another person talk sometimes.

She stopped screaming.

Are you listening I said.

She whispered yes yes.

Gloonk I hung up.

That night Genghis Khan and The Stomach were together. I didn't say anything.

I went home and put my foot in the toilet bowl and flushed the water. Who needs a hospital? A small skinny from Budapest? Not for me. A friend calls and I said hello Jack. I also have a toilet bowl. It sucks my foot and soon it feels better. At night I knock over the garbage bag under the sink so in the dark I listen to them eat. The rats are happy. I'm happy. I yell sleep. It comes like a taxi cab.

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Vadim Belotserkovsky

SOVIET DISSENTERS: SOLZHENITSYN, SAKHAROV, AND MEDVEDEV

I. SOLZHENITSYN'S MISTAKES

The ancients said, "Your teacher is poorly rewarded if you agree with him." Solzhenitsyn was a teacher, to all of us. He taught us honesty and courage. But now the time has come to disagree and to argue.

People in the USSR are subjected to monstrous exploitation and repression. They live in dire poverty, especially if one looks at the provinces and not at Moscow; they live on the level of the underdeveloped nations. And yet Solzhenitsyn sees a panacea for all ills in the renunciation of Communist ideology which has been no more than a hollow pretense in the country for a long time now—a fact he himself acknowledges. He considers it possible and even desirable, moreover, to retain an authoritarian system in Russia, albeit one under the "ethical umbrella" of Russian Orthodoxy and a fourteenth-century Orthodoxy at that, evidently considering such a renaissance a real possibility in the twentieth century. Solzhenitsyn is convinced that under these conditions the *existing* authoritarian system of the "big Gulag prison" could be transformed into a place of "goodwill and concern for all human beings." In defense of his vision he writes that "no one ever at any time or place demonstrated or brought into being a democracy operating within strict moral boundaries." But neither has anyone ever, at any time or place demonstrated or actualized an

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authoritarian system operating within strict moral boundaries—though authoritarian regimes have existed on earth far longer than democratic ones. It was they who set the examples for immorality and cruelty, "from antiquity to our day, from the reigns of Nero and Napoleon to the reigns of Hitler and Stalin." Many people laugh at the Socialists, who for the past fifty years have kept on hoping for the realization of Socialism with a human face. What then should be said about the millennial hopes of the authoritarians for the realization of an authoritarian society with a human face?

Solzhenitsyn sees the goal of the "new" system as the curtailment of economic development and the opening up of the North-East. In reading this sort of thing one can't escape the thought that it may be just a joke, or perhaps the whole letter is based on some wager? Human beings are living in unspeakable poverty, and he proposes the curtailment of economic development instead of the *restructuring* of its inner character. And on top of that, the idea of the North-East! Experts and everyone else who knows the Soviet North-Eastern Territory—two thirds of which consist of eternal frost, taiga, swamps and cruel climate—understand that the opening up of these regions for human habitation in the foreseeable future is the purest illusion. If it were possible at all, it would be only with the help of those who inhabit the Gulag Archipelago and for the sake of the Gulag Archipelago.

The notion of the Chinese threat makes more sense against this background. But most thinking and informed people, and Andrey Sakharov is one of them, tend to agree that such a threat is not very real. Not only Soviet leaders, as Solzhenitsyn admits, but the Chinese leaders as well are realists, or rather pragmatists, and they understand perfectly well that a Sino-Soviet war can only destroy their regimes and perhaps all their subjects. And, if they did decide to start a war, it would never be because of conflicts in Party lines, but because of conflicts about borders. Much more realistic and advantageous for the Soviet leaders could be an expansion toward the West, toward the Middle East, toward Rumania or Yugoslavia. Or toward West Germany or Italy, perhaps, in the event that real trouble starts there.

But let us return to Solzhenitsyn's main thesis: Communist ideology. It would seem that out of his disgust with Marxism

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Solzhenitsyn rejects not only materialism but, actually, a scientific approach to social and economic problems. Yet, almost all experts familiar with the structure of Soviet industry, including many of its own managers, know perfectly well that the system is now based not on any ideology, but on the authoritarian, centralized administration of the country's nationalized economy. There is no competition, no standard of quality; intercommunication and initiative are greatly hampered; machinery and materials are neglected and wasted. As a result we see incalculable losses which must be urgently compensated "outside the plan" and—this is the central point—the needs of the machines come first. Machines cannot be persuaded or coerced into working without secured supply. People work for the sake of machines, and new factories are built so that the old ones will not come to a halt. Soviet propaganda calls this "industrialization" and Solzhenitsyn calls it "(evil) competition with the West." Competition, particularly in the area of armaments is a factor, of course, but it is an aggravating factor and not the decisive one.

Under such conditions the authorities simply cannot afford to soften authoritarian pressures such as, for instance, censorship. As Arkady Belinkov, the Soviet dissident writer and critic (who escaped to West Germany and died in the United States in 1970), expressed it, "The problem is not that the authorities do not want to *grant* freedom, but that they are *unable* to do it." Ideology was, of course, to blame for the creation of such a system . . . in the year 1918. To change the situation today, however, one obviously has to start not from the eggshell out of which the "authoritarian" chicken was hatched, but from the chicken itself! It is essential to decentralize and "separate industry from the state" (Otto Schick's formulation), as is well understood by the major part of the scientific-technical intelligentsia and by many workers. But this first mandatory step meets resistance from the proliferated bureaucratic officials who do not want to part with their authoritarian power, nor indeed to part with their power at all. And it is clear that a large part of the present gigantic government bureaucracy would have to be abolished.

The situation is further aggravated by the extreme overexpansion of heavy industry during the last fifty-five years, to which the arms race contributed. This impedes the kind of economic flexibility still

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possible for the other East European governments. And finally, mistrust of their leaders has reached its highest pitch and has in many cases turned into hatred.

For no reason whatsoever, Solzhenitsyn also brings the theme of Communist ideology into his discussion of Soviet foreign policy. Ideology does not explain the Soviet Union's many acts of betrayal of foreign Communists: the German Communists in the early thirties, by Stalin's pact with the magnates; the Spanish Republicans in 1938 and the Polish Communists in 1939, by the disbandment of the Communist Party and the pact with Hitler; the Indonesian Communists in the fifties, through the pact with Sukarno, who was then drowning Communists in the ocean; and today their friendship with Arab leaders who slaughter their Communists periodically. Even more astounding is Solzhenitsyn's statement: "The Soviets have nurtured Mao Tse-tung instead of the peaceloving Chiang Kai-shek." The fact is that Stalin betrayed Mao in 1945 by signing a treaty with Chiang Kai-shek and surrendering the key industrial province of Manchuria to him. He himself annexed Port Arthur. "We, people of the older generation," said Stalin, "waited forty years for this day." It was only when Moscow realized that the Communists were winning in any case that they betrayed Chiang Kai-shek in his turn. "How many divisions does the Pope of Rome have?" said Stalin. This is the entire "ideology" of the Moscow leaders in the realm of foreign policy.

And if present-day Moscow extends its reach so far and wide, isn't it acting in the tradition, as Amalrik puts it, of "spilling over like rising yeast dough?" Weren't the Alps for Suvorov and Korea with the battle of Tsushima, in their day, as remote as Cuba or South America? Moscow today is more nationalistic than St. Petersburg ever was! It uses other people's hands and other people's blood to pull its chestnuts out of the fire. If one could draw up a balance sheet, calculating how much Moscow has stolen or bought on the cheap from its "wards," it would certainly come out in Moscow's favor. Without its requisitions from East Europe the regime would definitely have collapsed by now. Here too it is clear that "ideology" is no more than a mask for the state-capitalist imperialism of a great power.

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In the second version of his *Letter to the Soviet Leaders*, intended for the West, Solzhenitsyn writes that he can be convinced of the fallaciousness of his proposals not by clever criticism but only by a proposal "for a better and more realistic solution laying out a clear course." It seems to me, however, that Solzhenitsyn's appeal for a discussion is inappropriate by its very nature. He cannot help knowing that there is not and cannot be any "clear course" for the liquidation of the existing regime in the USSR. There is only that course which Solzhenitsyn himself has followed up to now: the course of protest and education by word, deed, and example. In following that course, one must not be overcome by despair! One has to recognize the possibility that our generation may not live to see success. When and how this education will bear fruit, only God knows. It would be a good thing if this came about along the lines of the Czech "spring" of 1968. But there is no realistic possibility that the evolution of the regime will be smooth, and, even less, that it will be spontaneous, without mass struggle—as Solzhenitsyn would like to have it. Only a genuine outburst of public rage could force the leaders—out of fear now not for their power but for their very lives—to permit a Soviet Dubcek or Gierek to take power and embark on a course of real reform. This might be termed the "semi-revolutionary course."

And if the leadership had accepted Solzhenitsyn's proposals, the actual result would have been the temporary strengthening of the regime—so that life in Russia would have become even more unendurable. The decrepit, cracked existing ideology lets people take in an occasional breath of air. But a fresh new ideology of Russian Orthodox Nationalism might choke us to death. Only in one respect would Solzhenitsyn have guessed correctly: the North-East would really be opened up faster by the forces of a rapidly proliferating Gulag Archipelago. Such a development is possible, particularly in case of a real crisis. For a long time now, the authorities have been preparing little drawbridges to the territory of the Black Hundreds.[1] That is why they incessantly nurture anti-Semitism, and keep alive those illegal fascist groups such as the one which publishes the samizdat journal *Veche* and who regard the "international Kike-Freemason conspiracy" as Russia's main enemy. That is why they permit the legal

[1] Ultra-nationalist armed groups in pre-Revolutionary Russia which carried out pogroms of Jews and assassinations of liberal personalities.

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publication of such Slavophile journals as *Molodaya Gvardiya* [Young Guard] and *Nash sovremennik* [Our Contemporary]. The supertotalitarian state with all its monopolies and *organs* will always be able to make use of them and their work. They are being used even now to frighten off dissidents who are not "pure" Russians and the Western democratic intelligentsia.

A readership poll conducted in 1968-69 by the *Literaturnaya gazeta* [Literary Gazette] (a journal popular among all circles of the intelligentsia) gives some idea of the numbers of nationalistically oriented people in the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic). The poll was analyzed at the laboratory of economic mathematics of Novosibirsk University, where I was working at the time. The poll showed that the nationalistic Journals *Young Guard* and *Our Contemporary* were read by only 1.5% of those polled as compared to 40% who read *Yunost* [Youth] and 30% who read *Novy Mir* [New World], both of which were known for their liberal editorial policies a few years ago. Unfortunately, abroad the voice of the nationalists sounds louder than what one might expect from their actual numbers; the KGB makes no attempt to muffle it.

II. SAKHAROV AND SOVIET SOCIETY

People all over the world admire the unique duel of Andrey Sakharov and his friends against a state machinery unequalled today in power, ferocity, and perfidy. The very fact that such a man as Sakharov—the totality of his views and his personality—could emerge in the Soviet Union is an important cause for reflection.

Sakharov, world-famous both as a scientist and as a fighter, stands out first and foremost for his inborn modesty, gentleness, and lack of dogmatism. It seems superfluous to speak about the maturity of his ideas on democracy and law. Out of the tragic experience of our country, he learned everything an honest person needed to know. And still he did not turn to extremism, did not become a reactionary. In an interview for Swedish radio, for example, he said, "It is inconceivable to restructure the state fundamentally. What is needed is continuity and gradualism; otherwise we will again end with the horrible

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destruction and breakdown we have already experienced several times."

"Our Socialism is simply an extreme form of the same capitalist evolution which exists, let us say, in the United States or in other Western countries . . . and we should therefore not be surprised by the rise of the same problems experienced by them. The same problems of crime, of alienation, of identity. . . ."

To sum up and to add to my personal impressions (I saw Sakharov shortly before my departure from the USSR): one might draw a portrait of Sakharov using the whole list of alleged "Russian national characteristics"—in reverse. There is no trace of frivolity or irresponsibility in him; no tendency toward instability, toward heresy, toward mysticism, but instead, utter sobriety. Finally, there is no bravado, but serene courage and consistency in everything.

The year before last, Moscow Jews assembled at the Lebanese Embassy to protest the crimes of the Arab terrorists at the Olympic Games in Munich. And Sakharov, too, considered it his duty to come to this assembly. The whole group was, of course, immediately surrounded by police and agents of the KGB who proceeded to beat the demonstrators and shove them into buses. People who had fallen down were kicked and dragged on the pavement. Sakharov fortunately arrived a few minutes late for the "beginning" of the meeting (he came not alone, but with his son). The street was already cordoned off and the police colonel stopped him with the words:

"Where are you going?"

"Tell me please, where is the Lebanese Embassy?" Sakharov asked.

"What is your business there?"

"I want to express my protest."

"Then get inside that bus!" pointed the colonel.

When, toward evening, after the interrogations, we were allowed to leave the police "sobering-up" station where we had been kept, I saw Sakharov's tall figure among those released earlier. He was waiting with the others until the last of the arrested was freed, to make sure that nobody had been "set-apart" by the police or the KGB.

It is common knowledge that Sakharov attends almost every political trial, spending long days together with the friends of the defendants standing at the doors of these "open" courts, which are

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actually closed to the public. Everyone knows that he responds to almost every illegal act of the authorities and that he is active in the Committee for Human Rights, that organization so odious to the government.

And, still, Sakharov does not indulge in dicta, never attacks others with rude words, never condemns a man broken by life or by the KGB. He has no trace of malice against anyone or anything. He is incapable of condescension.

Some readers must certainly feel utterly perplexed by now. What is the connection between Sakharov and the people? He must be an exception, perhaps even among the Soviet intelligentsia. However, I dare to maintain that Sakharov is not only not exceptional, but even typical. The real question is: for which milieu is he typical?

Sakharov himself begins his *Memorandum* with the following words: "The author's views were formed in the milieu of the scientific-technical intelligentsia which manifests great concern for theoretical and practical problems of foreign and domestic policy, as well as for the problems of future mankind."

The point is that the various layers of Soviet society are remarkably divergent from one another in a number of important moral and social characteristics. One might almost say that several peoples or nations co-exist within the Soviet Union. These differences are not easily recognizable. People are too prone to generalize and to over-emphasize national characteristics.

In free and developed countries, people of different social layers are brought closer together by common traditions, by democratic organizations and processes and, finally, by religion. All these connective and equalizing elements barely exist in the Soviet Union. Instead oppression reigns. Oppression, as we know, bends or breaks some people, while others are hardened and cleansed by it. Moreover, each layer of society reacts differently, both psychologically and philosophically, to such oppression. Some people try to break away from oppression, to go forward so-to-say, others go backward; some turn to the left, others to the right. That too hinders mutual understanding among the different layers of society.

Mutual understanding is further obstructed by the primitive

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concepts of human psychology held by many Soviet people including the intellectuals. The Soviet years have put their mark on this discipline perhaps more deeply than on any other. Freud's teachings, the basis of contemporary psychology, were and still are determinedly suppressed. The works of Freud and many other "bourgeois" psychologists are not published in Russian and are given out in libraries only by special "permission!" The result is that many people have no real idea of the complexity and multiplicity of the human psyche, and judge people only at the uppermost level of their consciousness which is directly conditioned by external circumstances and by the need for adaptation. People often lack the capacity to identify with others, to understand their circumstances. Responsiveness is blunted. One would have to share too many bitter experiences.

Russian society can be regarded as divisible into six layers or categories (accepting a certain unavoidable arbitrariness):

1. The ruling oligarchy
2. The scientific intelligentsia
3. The humanistic intelligentsia
4. Engineers and factory workers
5. The peasantry
6. Petty service and trade employees, including workers and technicians in those fields. (Hereafter these will be referred to collectively as the "sixth layer.")

One could, of course, separate the engineers from the factory workers and combine them, in a more conventional way, with the scientists. But we believe that this would not correspond to the true facts. Given the acceleration and expansion in the numbers of engineers and technicians and their cruel exploitation on the same level as that of the workers (or even worse), these two groups have merged and become almost one, with almost identical interests and characteristics. Simultaneously, this broad and ever growing layer of engineers and technicians contributes to the intellectualization of the body of factory workers and transforms it into an independent force which, hopefully, will become a base for democracy in the future.

I believe that the category of "engineers and factory workers" has, by now, very little in common with the peasantry and even less

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with the "sixth layer." Between the disreputable, thievish, drunken sanitation technician of the housing administration and the average factory technician lies an abyss. They belong to different nations. The humanistic intelligentsia, however, whose daily contacts are mostly with the "sixth layer," bases its evaluation of the entire people on such encounters. On the whole, the "sixth layer" really does present an unattractive picture and it fills the intellectuals with panic. The "sixth layer" has become morally alienated and has learned less than the other social categories, but it is just this group which Sinyavsky, Amalrik, and many others use as their model. Lumpenproletariat remains the same everywhere and always. The Soviet lumpenproletarian is, of course, even less attractive since he has kept no inner resource to hide behind as defense against the influence of the Soviet way of life, a way of life described in the folk saying, "Dog eats Comrade dog."

Nadezhda Mandelstam (and she is certainly no materialist) writes, "Wherever an iron discipline reigns 'the masses' emerge, but people in the factories live their own life and *remain people* . . . live their special, perfectly human life which does not mechanize them in the least. They do not become part of 'the masses.'" She means "the masses" of inborn slaves.

Remember the types of workers with whom Nadezhda Mandelstam lived and worked during the most terrible years! There is nothing unstable, disreputable, frivolously irresponsible or slavish about them! How closely, on the contrary, do they resemble the "Sakharov type." Mrs. Mandelstam repeatedly stresses the absence of any alienation from or hostility toward the intelligentsia, especially toward their own, the factory intelligentsia, on the part of the workers. For about five years I worked as a teacher of chemistry and physics in workers' youth schools and, later, for ten years I was a correspondent reporting on industry and science. I fully share Mrs. Mandelstam's views and am convinced that the intensive and clearly visible lessons of the fifty-five years of Soviet rule have not been wasted on the majority of people from the category "engineers and factory workers." What they learned is of vital importance, since it is the base on which it will be possible to establish democracy in Russia. They learned to loathe

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violence, intolerance, dictates, lawlessness and bureaucratism; they learned to hate sisyphean work and demagoguery. They firmly associate lack of freedom with cruel bureaucratic *disorder*, whereas freedom is associated with order and not with anarchy: with an order based on democracy and self-government. Many of them are not yet fully conscious of all that, but nonetheless it is deeply and firmly rooted in them. The conscious mind of the worker or the engineer may still be clouded by the poisonous smoke of Soviet propaganda, but in his subconscious lives a profound antipathy to the regime, and perhaps even a hatred of it. Whereas the opposite, unfortunately, seems to be true of a large part of the humanistic intelligentsia. Various liberal ideas, according to the fashion of the day, lie on the surface of their conscious minds, but in their subconscious there is darkness, fear of change, a foreboding that under conditions of freedom they might not find their place and might be incapable of competing. Frequently, there is also extreme egoism. Their talk of lofty spiritual values is often combined with surprising disrespect for decency and goodness.

It was a large part of the humanistic intelligentsia which, more than any other social category except the "sixth layer," became the moral victim of the Soviet way of life. More than all the rest, they were morally alienated and failed to learn anything of significance.

Sakharov spoke of this in a recent interview with Olle Stenholm, the Swedish radio correspondent: "The intelligentsia is beginning to retreat either into narrow professionalism, or into a kind of double life at home and at work . . . leading to greater hypocrisy and further debasement of moral and creative standards. This affects the technical intelligentsia much less than the humanistic intelligentsia, which finds itself at a complete dead end." One has to know Sakharov to understand how weighty his evidence must have been if he brought himself to voice such a general censure.

Amalrik formulates the issue even more sharply in his open letter to Anatoly Kuznetsov: "Sometimes I think that the Soviet literary and artistic intelligentsia, that is people who have become accustomed to think one thing, to speak another, and to do a third—is an even more repulsive phenomenon than the regime which gave birth to it."

The dialectic here is the following: the one who accepts lies and even believes them is less destroyed by them than the one who creates the lies, preaches them, and does not believe them.

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The "Sakharovs" are indeed atypical of this category of intelligentsia. It must be kept in mind that he said, "My views were formed in the milieu of the scientific-technical intelligentsia."

Finally, it is essential to draw one more highly important ideological distinction. The Soviet people might be categorized in two groups or layers which will be referred to hereafter as the "restricted" and the "coerced." To the category of "restricted" belong, of course, the humanistic intelligentsia, those belonging to the so-called "free" professions, and a large part of the "sixth layer"—i.e., black market "businessmen," artisans, individual peasant-farmers, etc. To the category of "coerced" belong many scientists, engineers, factory workers, employees and teachers.

The greatest hope of the "restricted," of course, lies in liberation from their restrictions. For the humanistic intelligentsia this means freedom from censorship, Party dictates, and so on; for black market "businessmen," it means liberation from the OBKHSS [Division for the Campaign against Embezzlement of Socialist Property]. Many of the "restricted" are simultaneously "coerced," but their employment is usually connected with their restricted status. Because of their privileged position and their acquired characteristics, which have been previously discussed, these "restricted" have little concern for the "coerced," do not concern themselves with Soviet social and economic problems, particularly with the problem of doing away with state capitalism in the USSR. They are fascinated by extreme idealism as a reaction to materialism, and often do not even understand what state capitalism means. Many of them have no objections to the state's retaining the ownership of large industry (the so-called "mixed economy"). Others advocate the restoration of capitalism. The majority of the "restricted" think about democratization in theoretical terms only and fear that the people are not "ripe enough" for it. Subconsciously, they are afraid that they themselves may be "over-ripe" for a democratic society. One finds more frequently chauvinism, anti-Semitism, and neo-Slavophilism among the "restricted ones." When they turn to faith, as they often do, they manifest their religiosity as well as their other convictions in typical "Soviet style"—namely, militant intolerance and contempt for any

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dissenting view. On the whole, the range of their political views oscillates from moderate, theoretical liberalism to fierce reaction. Almost all of them reject revolutionary methods in the struggle against the existing regime. This marks yet another index of the striking difference between contemporary Soviet society and that of pre-Revolutionary Russia, where it was the humanistic intelligentsia which held the most radical views and produced most of the revolutionary leaders and ideologists.

The ideological orientation of the category I have referred to as the "coerced" is, of course, very different. For them, abrogation of censorship and granting of other democratic rights is not an end in itself, but only the means of achieving the liquidation of their status as "coerced ones." For fifty-five years they have suffered the ultimate form of subjugation. Once this burden is removed, any new form of oppression, even a less heavy one, will seem intolerable to them. As supportive evidence may I cite the developments in Eastern Europe during the uprisings of 1956 and 1968, when people were striving to achieve self-governing institutions. The "coerced ones" in any event are not inspired by the idea of restoring capitalism—since the new bosses would be the trusted and prosperous lackeys of the present hated regime and the black marketeers, now feeding off the regime, incapable of doing anything else. They are even less inspired by the prospect of retaining state capitalism with a democratic, multi-party "super-structure." Not to mention the basic incompatibility of such a combination,[2] this would mean that a great number of the hated bureaucrats would have to remain and would retain their power. The relatively passive attitude of the "coerced ones" is explained to a large extent by the lack of an acceptable alternative to the existing regime. Besides, it is much more difficult for them to fight than it is for the creative intelligentsia. Loss of a job in itself is a catastrophe for them. The "pen," the most basic weapon of the humanistic intelligentsia, is

[2] Nationalized heavy industry, since it is invariably a losing proposition and produces low-quality machinery, is in constant and ever-increasing need of pumping in new capital which has to be transferred from other sectors of the economy as, for instance, consumer goods industries (owned by the government or any other kind) because machines cannot be coerced or "persuaded" to work under conditions of shortages. Such pumping in of capital is of necessity compulsory, which means a totalitarian regime. The "hidden mystery" of state capitalism is that factories work and are built so that factories should not stop working—that is, to replace equipment prematurely worn out because of poor quality and neglect and also to plug up the gaps in the economy arising from the enormous and inevitable losses caused by the centralized administration of a nationalized "large economic system."

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not their weapon! That is why so little is known in the West about the views of the Soviet "coerced."

At the present time, however, ideas of self-government and group ownership of the means of production, as the only possible and realistic alternative to state capitalism, are beginning to spread among the "coerced ones." A teacher, S. Zorin and an engineer, N. Alekseyev, for example, write pseudonymously in the so-called Leningrad Program (Samizdat) "Time Does not Wait", "There is only one way to expropriate the ruling elite while not re-establishing a bourgeois class at the same time. That is to curtail the monopoly of the state sector severely by transferring the largest part of the means of production—factories, institutes, etc.—to the ownership of workers' collectives. The management of such collectives must be elective and ownership must go entirely to the members."

Some dissidents among the "coerced," it is true, still believe in the possibility of achieving "true Leninism." Some put their hopes on a revolution, and others (like Sakharov) believe in an evolutionary solution. But almost all the dissidents in the latter category are united in their determination to go *forward* and not backwards or sideways in their struggle against oppression. They see the continuity of history in tomorrow succeeding today and yesterday, and not the day before the day before yesterday. They do not lose their faith in the power of human reason, are not afraid to seek and experiment and do not limit freedom of thought and art with the absurd, reactionary notion of avoiding the entire subject of the structure of society, the most fundamental issue for mankind. Finally, they do not separate Russia's problems from the problems of the West. As Sakharov says, "We have the same problems—only ours have reached an extreme form." Similarly, they identify with the struggle of progressive democratic forces in the West from which they exclude the Communists and the radical left.

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III. DEMOCRATIZATION OR OPPORTUNISM?

(Apropos of Roy Medvedev's article, "The Problem of Democratization and the Problem of Detente.")

The historian Roy Medvedev, a dissident well known in the Soviet Union and abroad, is the author of *On Socialist Democracy* and co-author with Andrey Sakharov and Valery Turchin of *Appeal to the Party and the Government: Concerning a Question of Great Importance*. Until recently he was regarded as the representative of the so-called Marxist trend among the opposition, which included General P. Grigorenko, I. Yakhimovich, I. Dzyuba and many others as well. Recently, Medvedev has published several articles criticizing leading members of the opposition movement in the USSR, among them Andrey Sakharov. The most important of these articles, "The Problem of Democratization and the Problem of Detente," offers the most comprehensive treatment of the author's present views on the USSR's basic problems and its relations with the outside world.

Medvedev's approach is reducible to the formula: Leave the Soviet government alone! He is particularly insistent that negotiations on rapprochement and detente not be "complicated" by pre-conditions and "ultimatums" from the West. Rapprochement and detente will of their own accord lead to the liberalization of the Soviet regime and to "further concessions" by the Soviet leadership.

Medvedev's theory is based on the following main points:

1) The "right-wingers" and the "moderates" inside the Soviet leadership are locked in battle and, therefore, excessive pressures are to be avoided, so as not to frighten the "moderates" nor give additional ammunition to the "right-wingers" for a hardening of the regime. If the thaw in foreign affairs has not yet affected the domestic climate to the same degree—this is, according to him, merely temporary. The domestic leadership is simply not as well prepared for the new mood as the leaders in foreign affairs. Moreover, external and internal pressures have angered the "right-wingers" or even perhaps driven them into a more militant stance. Only a little more patience is needed and then everything will be all right!

2) The Russian people, accustomed to obedience, are silent and do not support this "insignificant, tiny group of intellectuals"—the

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opposition. Consequently, their activities are futile and only provoke a counter-reaction from the authorities. And therefore, he claims, the opposition should not receive too much support from abroad!

Any serious changes in the USSR can be initiated only from above as at the Twentieth Congress. The people can be awakened only by a series of grave economic crises, but these are "unrealistic and *undesirable*" and so the regime will not allow them to occur, since "the economic growth of all branches of the economy" will *continue* even under conditions of isolation, albeit "at a slower rate than is possible under a socialist system." [sic!]

3) Western public opinion, particularly the "right," is not genuinely interested in the democratization and prosperity of the Soviet Union because it fears competition from it. For this reason, the Soviet opposition should not count on much support from the West. In short: "Don't make such a fuss, friend, just drown quietly!"

The general thrust of Medvedev's article is in full harmony with the official Soviet line and with the irate letters denouncing Sakharov pouring in from Soviet scholars and milkmaids. On the whole, his theory seems to be contradicted both by facts and by elementary common sense.

To obtain concessions from any party in a deal, and certainly from the Soviet leaders, one has to *insist* upon them! Facts of which Medvedev is fully aware clearly demonstrate that at times only ultimate pressure can succeed in wringing concessions from the Soviet government. The removal of missiles from Cuba was forced by the blockade; the authorization of a substantial Jewish emigration . . . by the self-sacrificing act of the Leningrad "highjackers"; the abolition of the monstrous tax on Jewish emigrants . . . by the Jackson amendment; the non-intervention of Soviet troops in the last Arab-Israeli war . . . by the American military alert.

However, a deeper analysis of Medvedev's theoretical premises is called for.

1) *On Medvedev's assumption of the existence of right-wing and moderate groups within the Soviet leadership.*

Medvedev's article is addressed, as has been mentioned, not only to Soviet but also to Western readers and the latter are used to assume

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that such groupings *always do exist* within a government. This is what Medvedev counts on. In fact, however, nobody has ever produced any hard evidence for such a hypothesis (except perhaps for a brief post-Stalin period). Always and everywhere, of course, some people will be more aggressive and others more moderate and sober. But to form *effective* groupings they, obviously, need some outside support from society and that presupposes a measure of independence for the people. It is imperative to have layers of society economically independent of the state for classes or associations, parties, unions, a free press and other democratic institutions to exist. Nothing of the sort exists in the Soviet Union, as we know. What does exist is only the following:

a) A latent personal struggle for power in which the one who is trying to get to the top may become at any moment more "left" or more "right," more aggressive or more moderate than the one on top—but once in power, he will become practically a duplicate of his predecessor.

b) Soviet leaders who seem to us slightly more moderate, are often the ones closest to the helm of power, since obviously they have to take account of reaction from abroad and hence are made to feel a greater degree of responsibility for their words and decisions.

c) Finally, it is known beyond any doubt that the Soviet Party oligarchy consists of jittery bureaucrats who dare not have an opinion of their own and who anxiously strive to show their respect for the views of the authorities. And this is the main condition for success and advancement. As to setting one's hopes on the young cadres as Medvedev does, this is an illusion most Soviet people have discarded by now. A professional Party career is now regarded as being so dangerous, insecure and unworthy of respect that any half-way decent person who is at all able to do something else, will not aim at such a career and will discourage his children from it as well. Higher Party posts, as a rule, are filled by the morally and intellectually most backward people.

The rumors now being circulated of a struggle inside the Central Committee of the Communist Party, of an opposition to the policies of Brezhnev—may very well have been disseminated in the West by Soviet *organs* in charge of such operations. The message may come through as follows: If you overdo the pressure on Brezhnev and force

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him into major concessions, the right-wingers may get rid of him and, then, you won't have any detente at all! And Medvedev works this vein to exhaustion.

But if we probe even deeper we shall see whether the Soviet leaders actually possess any such freedom of choice of voluntarily liberalizing their so-called socialist regime. To answer these questions rationally, and not emotionally, it seems essential to see clearly how the existing Soviet regime operates. The "hidden mystery" of this system—unfortunately, not sufficiently understood by many even inside the Soviet Union—is the fact that basically factories work and are built only so that other factories should not stop working. That is why industry works for industry's sake and not to satisfy the material or, even less, the spiritual needs of the people. Nationalized heavy industry, deprived of a free market and of competition, produces low-quality machinery which, moreover, is poorly serviced and breaks down prematurely. Soviet economy also incurs tremendous losses because of the centralized administration and planning which are inadmissable in "a large economic system," especially in such a vast nation as the USSR.

As a result, we see a chronic rise in demand over supply, a chronic scarcity. But if people can be persuaded or coerced to live and work under conditions of scarcity, machines cannot—and this, I believe, is the "mystery of mysteries" of state capitalism. Therefore, the first concern of the regime is the needs of the machines and of the factories. Prematurely obsolete equipment must be replaced at once so that the wheels of industry may not stop rolling. Capital from all other sectors of the economy must be pumped continuously and in ever-increasing amounts into heavy industry (to be called group A). This freezes the standard of living of the population, intensifies their exploitation and creates conditions which, in turn, further debase their work standards. Soviet propaganda presents this malignant growth-process of heavy industry as a purposeful policy of the Party and the Government. According to a confidential report of the Institute of Economic Mathematics of Novosibirsk University (headed by the Academician Aganbegyan) 95% of the production of the machine-building industry of the USSR goes to supply the needs of group A and only 5% remain for the needs of group B, that is for the population. At the same time, 50% of the production of Group B serves directly or indirectly to

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satisfy the demands of the Moloch of heavy industry. This report, based on convincing figures, demonstrates that this situation cannot be accounted for, as is done by many, in the over-expansion of the Soviet military industry. This actually existing over-expansion only contributes to the swelling of heavy industry. And, may I add, it is precisely the need for new capital and high-grade equipment which is the basic reason for the country's growing military potential and its imperialistic inclinations since it explains the necessity of pumping capital out of the neighboring countries, annexed and held by force of arms.

To be able to coerce and "persuade" people to live and work under conditions of extreme scarcity, the regime is compelled to suppress constantly all democratic rights throughout the country. And yet Medvedev asserts that "the economic growth of all branches of the economy will continue even under conditions of isolation." He goes on to say, "We see today that more and more of our national leaders are becoming aware that the Soviet Union cannot be allowed much longer to lag so far behind the capitalist countries in relation to the material welfare of the population." But as a historian, Medvedev should "see" that Soviet leaders have been aware of this lag for a very long time and are nonetheless incapable of doing anything about it.

Technical and economic assistance from the West in itself can at best only partially and temporarily appease the hunger of the Moloch of heavy industry; and it would also help to free additional resources for the further strengthening of the Soviet war potential. Once the West has adapted its industry to Soviet raw materials moreover—the only means by which the Soviet Union can pay—a brilliant opportunity for Soviet blackmail will emerge, similar to the one the Arab countries are carrying on with oil at the present time.

Assistance from the West could lead to the liberalization of the Soviet regime only if it could plug up all the gaps in Soviet economic life completely and continuously and, on top of that, take on itself the lion's share in supplying a population of 230 million with goods and produce. Such philanthropy, it would seem to me, is beyond the economic power of the "decadent West".

2) *On Medvedev's theory of the apathy of the people and the reasons for the hardening of the regime in the USSR.*

When Medvedev accounts for the hardening of the regime as a

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result of "excessive pressure" exerted by an "insignificant" tiny group of intellectuals and their allies abroad—he demonstrates a short-sightedness astounding in a historian. Intelligentsia live not only in cities, but at factories as well and, besides, there are the workers and peasants. They do not as a rule write letters of protest, nor do they meet with foreign correspondents; they have no opportunity for that, nor do they know how to go about it. This allows Medvedev to speak of them as apathetic. In actual fact, however, they inflict heavy daily losses on the regime which are not easily discerned. They refuse to labour "selflessly" any longer for the Moloch of heavy industry as they did in the early years of the Five Year Plans. As they say among the people: "As long as the government pretends that we live well, we will pretend that we work well." And this resistance does not always remain passive. "Quiet" strikes flare up from time to time and sometimes even rebellions such as those of the early sixties which passed over the country like a wave. Nor should the "noisy" uprising of the Polish workers in 1970 be forgotten: these workers belong to the same camp and live under an identical system. The Soviet leaders were terrified by these events which for a time impeded their attempts to extort capital from Poland and to pocket money from their own workers by means of a routine price rise on consumer goods. The rise had to be cancelled.

Finally, we should bear in mind the almost catastrophic personnel turnover in Soviet industry which encompasses up to 50% of the work force yearly.

Medvedev admits that the Soviet people are dissatisfied with a great deal and particularly with the *slow tempo* of economic, social, and cultural progress. But what they really are dissatisfied with is that the *conditions of their lives are terrible* and cripple them daily in body and soul. During the construction of the Volga-Baltic Canal for example, where I worked as a correspondent for *Izvestia*, engineers and workers lived under conditions difficult for a Westerner even to conceive. No adequate warm clothing was issued to them; their dilapidated houses and makeshift boxcars were so leaky and so penetrated by the frost that sometimes toward morning when the stove had cooled, people's hair would freeze to their pillows. The communal bathhouses and drying rooms were out of order for weeks, and just as often there was no hot food in the messhalls. Schoolchildren had to wear their overcoats in the classrooms and were constantly ill. And the roof of the

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hospital caved in. Since there was not enough money to repair the hospital, it was closed altogether and replaced by an infirmary where a single physician with two assistants saw about eighty patients a day, of which sixty were suffering from frostbite. While I was at the Cherpovetsky hydraulic station a rebellion broke out among workers recruited from recently mobilized soldiers. They won the right to leave the construction and seek their fortune elsewhere. I tried to include some of these facts in my *Izvestia* article, "Storm in a Dry Reservoir," but they were of course deleted—a graphic answer, incidentally, to the question of whether a voluntary liberalization of the regime is possible without radically changing its basic structure.

Khmelnitsky, the construction chief of the Volga-Baltic Canal, complained to me, "People are getting out of hand! They don't want to work properly. All they do is demand, 'Give me this, give me that!' They run around the country looking for the biggest ruble to grab, looking for places where things are easier and warmer. About 70% of the engineering positions here are filled by operators [people without the necessary training]. In old times [that is under Stalin] we didn't have any problems with specialists or qualified workers. When we needed any personnel we simply sent an order to the MVD [Ministry of Interior] which was then in charge of all major constructions and enterprises and they sent us as many as we needed."

"As prisoners?" I asked.

"In any capacity. There was discipline then! Even now, we can't manage without prisoners," and he pointed to a near-by fence of the prisoners section.

At a banquet to celebrate one of the achievements of the builders of the Volga-Baltic Canal, timed to coincide with a Party Congress, the drunken engineers began to reminisce about the construction of the Volga-Don Canal (under Stalin); and how many prisoners each of them had left inside the concrete walls of this canal. At that time, in order to maintain a high tempo of work, there was an order in force not to pull out the prisoners who had fallen into the cavities from exhaustion, but to pour concrete over them. And today admiring tourists are taken along these walls to sightsee!

Khmelnitsky, hearing these reminiscences, banged his fist on the table and said, "Those were dark days, sure—but, did we do a great job of construction!"

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In my more than ten-year-service as a correspondent reporting on industry, I heard from almost all the managers of constructions and of factories, "The country needs discipline!" They knew almost nothing about the activities of the dissident intelligentsia or knew it only from hearsay. Expressing their indignation that people had gotten out of hand they would add, "And on top of it, all those rotten little intellectuals in the big cities who do nothing but muddy the waters." Attempts at the complete enslavement of the workers, as under Stalin, did not cease either during the Khrushchev period nor in Brezhnev's time. This is well known. One need merely recall the preparation of "labor passports," and the campaign against "parasites" as well as Brezhnev's proposed law against "drunkards and drifters," already enforced to some extent.

We see, therefore, that the regime's hardening and re-Stalinization are far deeper than Medvedev indicates. The pressure of the dissident intellectuals did intensify the panic of the authorities and their consequent reaction. But it also served to trigger pressure from abroad, without which our country would doubtless be going through full re-Stalinization today (excluding, perhaps, mass terror on the 1937 scale, disastrous and ruinous even for a totalitarian regime such as the USSR).

Nobody can predict how long this situation will last.

I remember that a certain left-wing activist from the West visited Poland in 1970 and announced upon his return that Gomulka's Socialist regime was stable and flourishing. Exactly ten days later blood was flowing in Poland and Gomulka was swept out of power by an "uncontrollable explosion of discontent." There is no doubt that the regime itself would have been swept out with him if Gierek had not been backed by those same Soviet tanks.

People in the West still err on this question, but it is clear to any halfway intelligent and honest Soviet person that it is absurd to use the phrase "apathy of the Russian people," given the utterly totalitarian regime existing in the USSR. It is equally absurd to accuse the people of having once allowed such a regime to come to power. The implementation of Marxist-Leninist theory had never been tested before, and the slogans of the Bolsheviks were irresistible to a people exhausted by an interminable war. How can one demand of people perishing in the trenches that they should have analyzed and understood the deep-seated fallaciousness of Leninism when to this very day, after the

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tragedy of the Russian experience, broad circles of educated people in the West still dream of repeating this experience?

3) *On Medvedev's thesis that the West is indifferent to the democratization of the USSR.*

With this assertion, Medvedev spreads despondency among Soviet people who set their hopes on support from the West. Unlike most other Soviet citizens, Medvedev has access to Western literature and therefore cannot help knowing that in the West—side by side with indifferent groups—a growing number of people, many of them from the liberal intelligentsia, are increasingly aware that democratization of the Soviet Union is indispensable to the achievement of a genuine relaxation of international tensions.

The rise of such moods in the West disturbs the Soviet leadership seriously. In this respect Medvedev is actually assisting Soviet propaganda. Not only does he attempt to convince the West that it is harmful and futile to support Soviet dissidents, but he tries to frighten it at the same time with the specter of Soviet competition in the event that reforms and democratization are actually carried out there. And yet he is perfectly well aware that such competition is out of the question—on the one hand, because of the enormous potential pit of scarcity in the Soviet Union and, on the other hand, because the restoration of a capitalist system greedy for foreign markets is unthinkable in that country. The experience of the freedom movement in Eastern Europe demonstrates that the only alternative to state capitalism is a society of self-governing collectives with group ownership of the means of production and a legal, democratic government.

At times Medvedev's article sounds like the speech of a Soviet diplomat. When discussing the need for mutual concessions on the part of the Soviet Union and the West, for instance, he puts on the same level the Soviet jamming of Western radio broadcasts and the "possible refusal of the American Congress to grant the USSR the trade status of 'most favored nation'." "Our Country," he writes, "has already made that *concession* (that is has stopped jamming radio broadcasts) and now it is the turn of the American Congress to grant most-favored-nation status to the Soviet Union." In other words, we have stopped gagging you and now you must pay us for it! All this, too,

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you see belongs to the same realm of "peaceful offensive."

Further, after mention of the concessions on jamming of radio broadcasts, there follows an even more intriguing passage: "*Apparently*, it will become easier for foreign correspondents in the USSR to travel within the country and to meet Soviet people . . . next in line comes the question of giving the Soviet people wider access to Western newspapers and journals." (Starting from zero.) Here Medvedev seems to be handing his pen over to the notorious information-pedler, Mr. Victor Louis.

An example of Medvedev's style of argument is his statement that Soviet dissidents have recently begun "to express increasingly extremist views and to put forward ever less constructive proposals, ruled more by their emotions than by considerations of political expediency. "*One of those people*,"[3] he writes, "recently declared that even the Blacks of South Africa are not subjected to such harsh persecutions as the Soviet dissidents. Another,[4] after first criticizing Willie Brandt harshly and unjustly for his Eastern policy, said that Brandt should be judged by a Nuremberg trial of the future. A third *told friends* that Allende's regime in Chile had brought the country to an impasse and that the military coup, even with all its excesses, was the lesser evil for Chile and the Chilean people. *The fourth*[5] appealed to the American Congress not to encourage trade relations with the USSR until it guarantees freedom of emigration."

This is an utterly unworthy trick on Medvedev's part! He puts people of completely divergent views into one "bag" and furthermore, adds an anonymous person alleged to have said something to some friends. In no way different from the Soviet press, he depersonalizes Solzhenitsyn, Maksimov, and Sakharov and exploits this device to distort their statements. He mentions Maksimov's statement about a military trial for Brandt, but fails to mention that Sakharov censured this statement and that Maksimov publicly acknowledged Sakharov's criticism as justified. Finally, Medvedev knows that none of these three men would ever endorse the words of some anonymous person who approves of the terror and the military coup in Chile. After such a trick, the compliments paid to Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn, with which Medvedev's article is strewn, come through as sheer hypocrisy and assumed objectivity.

[3] Solzhenitsyn [4] Maksimov [5] Sakharov

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History has often borne witness to the fact that in trying and critical times for an opposition movement, people arise in its ranks who, sometimes out of the best intentions, call their comrades to retreat, to opportunism; and even to the liquidation of the entire movement. The momentum of such an attitude, however, usually carries them so far that they find themselves in the camp of their former adversaries and become, in fact, their most welcome guests.

Translated from the Russian by Lily Feiler

EDITORS' NOTE: A Russian exile, now living in Europe, Vadim Belotserkovsky has been a journalist on a number of newspapers and magazines, including Izvestia *and* Literaturnaya Gazetta. *Mr. Belotserkovsky was graduated from Moscow University in 1952 and with much difficulty, because of anti-semitism, found a job teaching physics and chemistry at an evening school for working people. Five years later, he clashed with the administration, lost his job and turned to work as a journalist. His first novel, IN A MAILCAR, was published in the Soviet Union in 1964 and provoked an investigation of its author by the government. In 1968, his second book was banned, and he was fired from the staff of* Literaturnaya Gazetta. *For the next few years, he took an active part in the democratic movement, participating in several demonstrations, among them a hunger-strike in the reception room of the Central Committee of the CPSU. In November of 1972, he left Russia with the wave of Jewish emigrants.*

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POEMS

Robert Bly

ANT HEAPS ON THE ROAD

It is good to stare at old wooden doors after working,
the cough the ant family makes in ground,
the blackish stain around screwheads.

How much labor is needed to live life!
Something turns its shoulders. When we do work
holes appear in the mountainside, no labor at all.

WINDS

How much energy is in the weeping willow
blown by October winds!
The pines hold in their energy,
and the little maples long for old men.

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NAMES

You should try to hear the name the Holy One has for things.
There is something in the phrase: "The Power taught him names."
We name everything according to the number of legs it has;
the other one names it according to what is inside.
Moses waved his stick—he thought it was a "rod,"
but on the inside its name was "dragonish snake."
We thought the name of Blake was "agitator against priests,"
but in eternity his name was "the one who believes."
No one knows our name until the last breath goes out.

RUMI

Version by Robert Bly
"Blake" is used here instead of the Caliph "'Umar."

James Wright

SAYING DANTE ALOUD

You can feel the muscles and veins ripple in widening and rising circles, like a bird in flight under your tongue.

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WRITTEN ON A BIG CHEAP POSTCARD FROM VERONA

Here they are on the balcony,
Garish, burned harsh into color.
In the city of Pisanello and Stefano,
Who lightly touched the Madonna's hair into wings,
I can buy this romantical junk for fifty lire
And send vulgarity home. Romeo, Giulietta,
How do you survive? Not even Shakespeare
Could kill you once and for all, lavishing
So much clear genius on his fierce cold play:
First his thugs on the streets, held back
From cutting each other's throats only
By threats of a flat thwack on the skull;
Then families hating each other,
The trysts after dark,
One pointless murder after another,
The questionable marriage the world
Would have hushed up and broken anyway,
And the absolutely final death, ridiculous,
Brutal, a cheap loss, a death cruel
And stupid as yours or mine.

Yet not even Shakespeare could kill them
Once and for all. If you don't believe me,
Just mention the names to anyone,
A stranger on the street: Romeo, Juliet.
And all that the stranger will remember
Is a radiance in the dusk,
A light wing fluttering in a vine,
Hands shocked by touching,
Strange and forbidden,
A bomb, and no chance
To live long.

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Oh, I know:
It's nothing after all
But a prosaic clutter:
Shakespeare, in a hurry,
Stole the plot of *Romeo and Juliet*
From a mediocre narrative poem
Written in fourteeners by Arthur Brooke.
And I know:
He probably lifted at least part of the plot
Of *As You Like It*
From an English translation of an Italian novella
By Robert Greene,
Who bad-mouthed the young Shakespeare
For stealing scenes from his betters,
As Greene, defeated and debt-ridden,
Lay whining penances
On his own dirty death-bed.
I know:
The citizens of Verona once called
Their ruler a crazy dog.
I know:
The heavens blossoming above this ravishing
And beautiful city blackened with wings
Of bombing planes,
And children scampering like mice
Into the cracks of the vast marble Arena,
All hell broken loose.
Oh, I know
All I'm giving you is a cheap, chintzy
Picture postcard, a gross and messy imitation
Of a poet's dream of something hopeless
That didn't have a chance in this world.
What chance do we have?
We are nothing but a poet's dream
Of lovers who chose to live.
Not a chance.

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Oh, I know:
I know, I know, I know,
How can I forget?
This world is a mess,
A sinking menace of loveliness and danger.
Fumbling to touch hands in the dark,
Their hands fluttered into flames.
I know, and yet—
Just mention their names
To any stranger,
Anyone at all.
He will recall
Not the strange menace of their loveliness,
But only the lovers.

THE LONELY POET

Many of the poets in our time were love poets devoted to real women. Nobody knows and all doubt that Edwin Arlington Robinson ever had sexual intercourse. I pray in the silences of my soul that somehow all critics, historians, biographers, librarians and the rest of us somehow missed one afternoon or one whole sleepless night of Robinson's sixty-five years while, unknown to us eternally, some kind understanding woman took the poet into her body at least once.

Like our other great men—Hardy, Williams, Jeffers, Lawrence, Frost—Robinson suffered the curse of Adam by going through the hell of this world. But alone and unlike the others, he knew hell without ever having known paradise, thrown out of the garden, apparently, without ever having eaten the fruit, outcast before he was born.

As far as we know.

But do we know so much?

I hope, while the other poets rest in the peace they earned through long lives, that Robinson alone is still alive in the body somewhere on earth, making love with a woman underground. It is a good hope. It is the hope of a living man. We don't know anything real about the dead.

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THE ART OF THE BAYONET

You're a right-hander. You spring forward from the right foot, behind you. You take three quick steps forward, exactly in the rapid movement you make in punting a football. You scream. You get him with the tip of the bayonet blade right down there in the nuts. You drive it in deep, you step back quickly as you rip it out quick, you take two steps back. He pauses. He stares and mumbles poetically singsong in a foreign language. You can't understand it. So much the better for you. You take your time. He hasn't yet had time to fall. Slowly you insert the blade in his large intestine. He gazes down, fascinated. Something is entering his body. He doesn't know what to make of this thing. You jab it into his body, as deep as you can get it. Then, quick as before, you rip straight up from the intestine. You do this in five seconds. Exactly. The instant you reach his jugular vein, or anything else the blade can reach just under the tip of his chin, you pull it out, step back with the same quick two-step, and turn your rifle precisely around. He is falling. He is falling. Hurry. Hurry. Smash his face in with the butt. Get him. Get him. Before he falls.

Now you are at leisure, so you slowly and almost luxuriously extricate a government issued cigarette from the K-ration packet and drag on it like Jay Gould pulling for five minutes on his cigar, and you think, as he thought, Let the bastards wait, let the bastards wait, I'm taking my own time, I want—

What do you want?

Leisurely you stroll into his village. It is now your village. He was the enemy.

You poor miserable blind deaf American son of a bitch, as you stand upright astride your dead brother's quivering body, giddy in your triumph, a vulture is fluttering drunk in your brain erratic as a blinded butterfly.

Suddenly the vulture poises perfectly still at some terrible height in your skull, and screams, and tears its razor beak into its own liver, and dies in mid-dream, and falls downward and downward and downward into the pit of your own body, suicide, dead as a stone.

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John Ashbery

FARM II

I was thinking
Now that the flowers are
forgotten
A whole new frontier
Backing around the old one are
Swamping its former good ideas
Ploughing under the errors too
In its tin maelstrom: the overloaded
Ferryboat slowly moves away from the dock
Are these dog-eared things

Weeds what you call them
These things sitting like mail to be read
Toward the end of afternoon
Things the mailman brought

I would like to enroll
In the new course
At the study center

A lattice-work crust
Holes are blobs of darkness
Has been placed across the road
You can't walk out too far that way any more
They say the children are demolishing
The insides of the woods
burnt orange
That it's spectacular

But it doesn't
Take us out into the open sea
Only to the middle of a river
Fumbling which way to go.

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Mei Berssenbrugge

THE MEMBRANE

In lower orders up to the mammal
a membrane
with its terribly narrow third dimension
still passed equally in both directions
The cargo itself changed
You could still believe
writhing through its tight reticulations
you might return, almost yourself
if you were strong enough
like a hero
but this next one is perfect
It takes everything in and uses it
perfectly, with no communication
Oh sometime in your sleep
on a dark night you might press your hand
toward a cool sheet
and brush against it like the womb wall
and be burned
That remains as a heavy ignorance the next day
or you might kill something
with your car when you are tired

When a thing leaves us
it no longer knows us
We miss it by the shape our senses
impress from habit into the rooms
where we hear it breathing
We're mad it knows something
now like a big voice or a sea
or the spider in front of the membrane
When a dead thing cuddles into its grave
like a minute we pity ourselves
cancel our myths

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Anne Hussey

GHOSTS

we are as we are
and no one can say we're not humble
or do not recognize our faults
we fight and are excessive we
smoke each other out of our hiding places
defend our territories and keep track these
are our common politics
but between you and me I feel there is
a lack of communication I want to tell you
why this ashtray has lept from the sidetable
to strike you on the forehead why
the shadow of the clock shakes
in my quadrant of your room and the coasters
tip and slide from their stack
I don't mean to hurt you but to let you
know you're not alone to say *hello*
and to give your life an added dimension
but no you look you clap your hand on the
back of your neck and swear at the floor
at the chrome legs of the glass table
growing out of the white shag rug no no
impossible the bourbon the time of night
you turn away and then back quick
the top flies off the tonic water
and the tonic bubbles in the bottle
something something by god
you are calculating distances *hello hello*
you are trying to decide I can see the
buttocks of your brain
working against each other
as if you were
running away

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Arthur E. Smith

POETRY AND POLITICS: An Interview with Philip Levine

Int: In judging a poem, do you take into consideration the poet's attempt, along with his finished product, or is it simply a matter of the best achieved poetry? Does ambition come into the picture at all?

Levine: Of course. That goes without saying. One of the most attractive qualities about a poem is its ambition. And I think that people rise to the occasion and that the best writing is really in the most ambitious poems.

Int: How do politics fit into a poem? I know that you're a political person, and yet your strongest poems are not concerned with politics at all. They are about people, individual persons who are lonely, depressed, on the verge of giving up—and yet holding on with a stubborn tenacity. This isn't politics, is it?

Levine: Sure.

Int: How so?

Levine: You're defining politics in a very narrow sense, as having to do with political parties. I think the writing of a poem is a political act. We now exist in the kind of a world that Orwell was predicting, and the simple insistence upon accurate language has become a political act. Nothing is more obvious than what our politicians are doing to our language, so that if poets insist on the truth, or on an accurate rendition, or on a faithful use of language, if they for instance, insist on an accurate depiction of people's lives as they are actually lived—this is a political act. You couldn't possibly make a movie about the way people live in the United States and show it to the Republican Party and find them liking it. They would find it an intensely political movie. And they'd be right, it would be a political movie. The fact that a poem deals with the kinds of . . . I mean, what are the sources of anger in a lot of the poems that I write and a lot of other people write? The sources of anger are frequently social, and they have to do with the fact that people's lives are frustrated, they're lied to, they're cheated, that there is no equitable handing out of the goods of this world. A lot of the rage that one encounters in contemporary poetry has to do with the political facts of our

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lives. So I don't see that there is any real conflict here. I think being a poet is, in a sense, a political act—that is, if you're a real poet, not just a kind of court singer. If you're somebody who wants to go to the White House and amuse people, if you're the Sammy Davis of poetry, the Rod McKuen, obviously even that's a political act, an act of lackeyism.

Int: You would define politics in a broader sense, as Vallejo or Neruda did?

Levine: Sure. You can define it in a number of ways, but certainly they are great political poets, and if you'll look at Vallejo you'll find that he never tells you how to vote, he never really talks about a political party. Occasionally he mentions that X is a Red, and as such he's shot, but by and large that's not what he's concerned with—he's concerned with the agony of living. One of the main reasons of living, why it's so agonizing, is that people with power have no compassion. And the minute you make that statement, it's an enormously political statement, and it describes our country as well.

Int: I notice that in the poetry of Hernandez or Vallejo or Neruda, when they narrow that political definition down into a particular party or person, it's usually a weaker poem.

Levine: I don't remember Vallejo or Hernandez writing that kind of programmatic poetry. They may have, but I'm not aware of it. I know, for example, in the late Vallejo, some of the poems are magnificent and they are war poetry, poetry trying to raise the spirits of the people. This is true in Hernandez also. For example, he has a poem in which he says that his breath, that which animates him, which gives him his language, and his words and his mouth—this spirit is the same desire for worth and animation of the people. And he talks about the Spanish people and their refusal to bow down to be sheep, and their insistence on living life as a full human being rather than (and he uses the image of a gelded creature) the ox. And then at the end of the poem he says something like, "If I have to die, let me die with my head held high, dead, twenty times dead, with my mouth closed on the rough grasses." He then has the image of a nightingale, "There, among the rifle fire, where our struggle is, there are nightingales singing," which is the image of the poet. You make song among those who fight. It is true that Neruda wrote some ugly, stupid, boring—mainly boring—hymns to Stalin. They were boring and naive, but when you take a look at the immense range of poetry the guy wrote and you single out a couple of shitty poems, and those poems are named over and over again as a sort of example of what happens when you become political, I think it's a real mistake. I think that that political power he took into himself and lived so intensely animated hundreds of lines of great poetry, and if he wrote a couple of clinkers, they shouldn't be held up as examples of what happens

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when a poet becomes political. All men must be political, obviously, if we're going to live in a community that's worth living in, and poets are no exception. Poetry is not outside the mainstream of our lives, and if you take it outside, then it seems to me to be something less than vital.

Int: Spanish poets, the very good ones, can write about a Spanish people and produce a really good poem, and I fail to see that in many American poets. You have to speak individually, or else sound fatuous.

Levine: I think you're wrong. Whitman talks about a people, and he's our greatest poet. Most of us don't talk directly about a people but we imply the people when we use the individual case. Our languages are different. But it is true that we have a harder time making the kind of general statements, and making them with authority. And when you look at the lives of many American poets you'll find that they are very alienated, all the way back to Emily Dickinson. So maybe we don't all feel that we speak for the people.

Int: Do you feel any compulsion to be socially responsive to any group or movement? Do you feel any social obligation to Black, Chicano, Indian or Women poets? There are some fine women poets in this country, but they have been played down and sometimes ignored. As a result of this, do you personally take a longer, more thorough look at books of poetry by women?

Levine: Women in America have been writing marvelous poetry for a long, long time, and I'm not at all sure that they have been slighted. They haven't been by my tastes. I think that with Blacks and Chicanos—and Indians I suppose, although I really don't have many acquaintances among Indians—something else has taken place that isn't so much in the awarding and the judging. It is something that takes place in their education where they are told that they can't write. It's as simple as that. They are discouraged from writing, so that you don't have Chicano poets to speak of until rather recently. They endured a school system which conspired, I think consciously, to tell them they could not write and even if they could learn to write they wouldn't write anything sophisticated or interesting enough to ever please this tremendous audience. They were discouraged in both cases from using their own language. In fact, they were told that they were illiterate. Blacks and Chicanos were told they don't have a language. Consequently, if their language is taken away from them, it is almost impossible for them to write.

Int: In other words, they are bilingual and yet have neither language?

Levine: No, they are not bilingual. Black people may become bilingual in America if they want to get jobs at MIT or at advertising companies. They speak a language which is a form of American English, which they are told is not a form of American English, but a shit, fucked-up language, bad language—but it is a perfectly articulate language with its own rules of

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grammar and in many cases it has a lot more vitality and expressiveness than the main WASP language. We are constantly borrowing from it. I notice that my kids, ever since they have been in school, have come home with Black expressions that have a lot of vitality and snap, just as I did when I was a kid. We borrowed heavily from Black language, just as we have been borrowing Black music and Black poetry and the blues and folk songs—and telling these people that they don't have a language and they don't have a music and they don't have a song and they don't have a culture. They've known otherwise. And they've gone on composing, writing and making great art. And we now pick up books that are written in Black language and we recognize that it's poetry. We know that Etheridge Knight is a tremendous poet. We know that Lucille Clifton is a fine poet, and . . . but that is recent. It seems to me that it's a very good thing. Thank God it's taking place. I see here, locally, a lot of very gifted Chicanos writing—a really vital literary movement. Part of the impetus comes from the fact that there is so much Chicano experience that as yet has not received its poetry, so that now there is this tremendous rush to give it the poetry it deserves. I find it one of the most vital movements, perhaps the most vital movement, in contemporary American poetry. I'm dazzled by how much good Chicano poetry there is being written by people who are really very young, still in their twenties. Now whether or not I am going to pick up every book by a Black or a Chicano or an Indian or a woman and say, "Wow, I owe this book something," I don't know that I'm going to do that. I'm going to start reading the book and if I'm enthralled and excited by it, then I'm going to be enthralled and excited by it.

Int: I was going to use the example of Sylvia Plath. Not that she was so ignored during her life, but she wasn't that recognized either. In fact, she didn't publish many of her good poems until after her death. Not many people were interested in them even when she was sending them out.

Levine: I think that's untrue. She was immensely successful—not successful in the way she became successful, which is really unlike the success of most poets. After she died she became a celebrity, but that's something else. I think as a poet she was very successful. She was younger than I and she was much more successful than I. I knew her work and I liked her work. The minute I saw the poems that were to wind up in *Ariel* I was enormously intrigued and excited by them, and so was everyone else I knew who read poetry.

Int: Robert Bly said in an interview in *The San Francisco Book Review* that if a poet is good and is writing good poetry, then for God's sake, leave him alone. Don't give him prizes and awards and money. These, if nothing else, will destroy him.

Levine: In general, that's probably true. Although I'm not going to name

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anybody who has been destroyed by a prize—except for Tony Curtis and Marlon Brando. (Laughter) All the movie stars, all the movie stars. . . .

Int: Speaking of Bly, he's beginning to exert some influence at least among some younger poets through his magazine *The Seventies*, and of course there's the Black Mountain school—

Levine: I'd like to interrupt you. Bly began exerting influence on whatever a younger poet is back in the fifties. The magazine was originally called *The Fifties*. And it was much more exciting in the fifties and sixties than it is now. How many issues have there been in the seventies?

Int: One, as far as I know. . . .

Levine: That's right. So it's hardly a very vital magazine. Most of us know what he has to say. His contribution has been immense, but I don't think that it is very strong in younger people. I've seen a great reaction against it, for reasons I don't entirely understand.

Int: His poetry isn't all that strong, and yet he seems to—

Levine: I disagree. He's a very strong poet.

Int: He had very weak moments in his last book. But his magazine—

Levine: There are really weak moments in Whitman, weaker moments in Whitman than there are in Bly. Some of the worst poems you could ever read were written by Whitman, also some of the greatest. Whether Bly's last book was up to his best, I don't know. I don't happen to think it was his best book either, but he's still a tremendous poet, and a lot of the authority of the magazine comes from the fact that you know you are being addressed by a tremendous mind, a tremendous spirit, a tremendous poet. The spokesman before Bly was Rexroth. Maybe they shared it for a while. Obviously, there's going to be a new spokesman. Bly had an immense influence in the fifties and sixties, but I don't really know that he's going to be the influential figure of the seventies. I would think not. I would think it would be somebody else, a younger person. . . .

Int: Getting back to the schools of poetry, the Black Mountain school, the New York school, the Iowa workshop. . . . You have managed to remain somewhat aloof from all of these. Your poetry hasn't seemed to have been particularly influenced by any certain school.

Levine: I have been influenced by a great many people who write poetry. I remember reading Allen Ginsberg back in the fifties when I was at Iowa, and liking him better than anything anyone was liking at Iowa. Iowa wasn't a school, it was a university. There wasn't a school of poetry there then. I haven't kept up with what's happening there since and I don't have any particular interest to. There was some real similarity in the Black Mountain poets, but I think what poets give each other is sympathy, and careful reading and honest criticism. I've taken from wherever I could find it. I read

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a lot of prose writers and try to learn from them. If you look at almost all the good poets you would find that this is true. There are poets around who are recognizably, say, Black Mountain. I really don't—I take all that back. I really don't know what a Black Mountain poet is, except that I know some people who were at Black Mountain. If you showed me a poem and said, "Is this a Black Mountain poem?" I couldn't tell you. I'm not that interested in movements. Poetry is something that takes place alone, in solitude, in silence. And then there are these social relationships that people work out. They live in New York and so they become. . . . They have these friends. They are influenced as much by their friends' behavior and dress as they are by their poetry. Poetry comes out of the whole life and goes back into the whole life. Here I live in Fresno, and have for a long time. There was no real group of poets here, and so if I don't sound like a Black Mountain poet or a New York poet, it's small wonder really. And my influences have changed as I grow older. My tastes have changed and so my poetry has changed. I don't read the magazines with any faithfulness. I don't really know what's being written in America. This year reading all these books is a kind of welcome thing for me—to find out what's being written in the country.

Int: Maybe what you've been saying so far is the reason why you haven't been influenced by any particular style of writing.

Levine: I have an idea of the kinds of poems that I want to write. I don't have a clear idea what they are, but I have an idea. Sometimes when I write a poem I think, "That's it! That's what I want." So I do have a kind of conception of what a poem ought to be. I don't know where it came from, and I think it's very old in me—all the way back to my teens probably, and it's been modified and changed with my experiences as a guy living in particular places and particular times, and my reading experiences. This is true for most of us. I think this "schools" thing is a way of dealing with poetry without reading. That is, if I pick up one of those books over there and I begin to say, "Unhuh, New York," well I can dismiss a book then without really coping with what it might be saying, without its challenge to me. I might pick up one of those books, read it, and say, "My heavens, this guy is doing things I never thought of doing, and it's really interesting. Maybe I ought to become a different kind of poet." That's a powerful experience. Or I might learn something. A guy might start talking about a particular subject: the stars, flowers, his neighbor, and I might suddenly be shocked into my deadness to the stars, flowers and my neighbors. But if I don't want to have a poetic experience, I can pick up the goddamn book and say, "Unhuh, Iowa," and slip it in a pigeon-hole. "Ah, Beat, Hip, Black Mountain. . . ." I'm just not interested in reading that way. It's a waste of time, and that's one of the reasons I don't read "reviews." It's the thing

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that goes on again and again in reviews, so I don't read them. I'm not interested in coping with poetry. I'm not really interested in dealing with it. I'm mainly interested in getting its vision, getting its energy, getting its vitality, and being inspired by it.

Int: You mentioned Fresno. You've been a tremendous influence on a lot of very young people. You've shown them that a poem can be written and that it is alive. And yet some of the poets coming out of Fresno have tried very consciously to emulate your poetry. Do you deal with that in any way, or do you just let it run its course?

Levine: Oh, no. I tell them to cut it out. I tell them to stop it. There have only been a few. . . . There are a lot of poets who have written a poem that might sound like me, but then they have written eighteen poems like Merwin and twelve like Bly. A lot of poets go through a lot of phases. It's very natural that one be influenced by people close to one. It's an added dimension in the poetry of someone who you meet and know and maybe you like the person, but I. . . . So that in the beginning I don't think it's any problem. If a guy's in Freshman class, a very beginning writing class or something, and someone's poetry sounds a little like me, I try not to make too much out of this. If someone's been writing for two or three years and he's really doing my work or anybody else's work too heavily, I try to point that out to him. I try to say, "Well, look. There comes a time when you have to invent your own poetry. You can learn a lot from other people, but I just want you to be conscious of the fact that Bly also wrote a poem about what you're writing, and a better one. And your going into the field and walking up to the horse already took place in a Jim Wright poem, and it's been imitated a thousand times." I think you have a duty to a serious young poet to inform him when you're aware that he's derivative, or overly so, but on the other hand, we do learn by imitating. You've got to be careful about it. You just can't say to everybody, "Don't write like that because somebody else wrote like that," because then I think that one can develop an overly heightened desire to write a new poem, a poem nobody else has written, which can be silly.

Int: Do you see any particular reasons for the sort of emotional malnutrition that is published as poetry every year, and for the fact that many young poets seem to have one good book of poetry in them and after that it's all downhill? Are they lacking a spiritual or emotional depth in their lives? Are they simply cashing in, bowing out to praise, or what?

Levine: I'm not aware of it to be honest with you. I don't even know who you could possibly be referring to.

Int: How about James Tate? Although he has his good poems, individual poems scattered through—

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Levine: Yes. But how old is he?

Int: Maybe 32? 30?

Levine: So it seems very presumptuous to say that he's got one good book in him. He may have forty more years of writing life. He's written many good poems, he's been very successful, and because he has been so successful he's probably published everything he writes, whereas with a less successful poet we wouldn't be so aware of his bad poems—they wouldn't be in print.

Int: That's what I'm getting at. Roethke, for instance, was supposed to have published only about five percent of everything he wrote before his death, whereas Tate—I would imagine just from the sheer volume—publishes ninety percent of everything he writes.

Levine: I would tend to think that the late Roethke published a lot more than five percent. In the beginning, he had a very hard time making a career of it. And if you'll read his letters, you'll see how much his career meant to him. It's sad to see that he was a careerist in every sense of the word. He worked hard to create his success, and when he got successful he loved it, he ate it up. I don't see anything wrong in liking your success. You would have to be an idiot to be ashamed of your success. I mean, you fail in so many things in life that you might as well get the most out of it. . . . But I'm just not aware of people writing one book and failing. Some people get run over by trains and their lives are cut short, but I'm trying to think of someone who wrote one good book. . . .

Int: How about Bill Knott or Dennis Schmitz?

Levine: Well, I continue to find the poetry of Schmitz very interesting, and he too is a guy in his early thirties. I didn't publish a book until I was 35 years old. I don't know what a book I would've published at 28 would've looked like. It might have looked like shit. The rhythms of people's lives are different. I think, in other words, that you're creating a kind of imaginary villain. The poet who writes one book and "cashes in" as you say, and then turns his back on writing. I don't think it happens. What one frequently finds is that a poet writes the poems of his twenties and in his thirties he's not interested in writing them again. He's not the same guy. In the first place, he's already written those poems and there wouldn't be much sense in writing them again—

Int: That's one thing—

Levine: Let me finish. The other thing is that he is somebody else. So he begins to write another poem. Maybe he begins to experiment with another style. And if he started early, then of course he's perfected a style. James Tate was awfully good when he was awfully young. A great many American poets weren't even writing at the age that he was very proficient. I was just beginning. So at the age of thirty, he has a lot to throw away before he can

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find his new style. Maybe it's more difficult for him. I admire the fact that he searches around and tries different things. Also, we tend to think of a poet in a certain way. Knott, for instance. We pick up his first book and say, "Ah, this is just marvelous, terrific." Well, he didn't want to write that book a second time. It was a very wise decision on his part. I don't know whether it was reached in a wise way, but I think he was right. The minute you turn away from doing what you have done already, what people expect of you, even if you do well or ill, you run the risk of blame rather than praise. In spite of what everyone says to the contrary, you're thought of in a certain way. You know, Ginsberg is supposed to write *Howl* again. And I remember when *Kaddish* first came out—I happen to think it's one of the great American poems—but I also happen to know that a great many people were puzzled by it and thought it was a bore.

Int: OK. Maybe for the sake of conversation I am creating an imaginary villain. But could it be the book publisher's fault also, or publicity?

Levine: Again, I don't think it exists. I think it's your fault. And if this discussion went on in any interesting way, I'd have to ask you why you created this villain. I might ask you now, why do you want these guys to exist? [Laughter] Why do you need to invent them? That's the only fruitful direction we could go. . . .

Int: I see a lot of talent in a poet like Tate, or Knott, or whoever, and so much of it seems to be a mindless groping. There are a lot of vacuous spaces. You can read a lot of Tate before you hit upon a good poem. I did a review of his book, *Absences*, and I liked it. It was good, but you have to go through it. There are some awful poems in it, awful. . . .

Levine: Yeah. There are a lot of awful poems in Hardy too, but they don't bother me. You only read them once. Again, it's a question of the way people want to write, and how they write their good poems. If Tate finds that he writes his good poems by writing a lot of poems, then I suppose that's what he has to pursue. If Roethke suppressed ninety percent of his work as you say he did, well, that's the way he worked. Apparently Rilke could sit there for years, with great patience, with the assurance that genuine inspiration would come. I can't, and it would be very foolish of me to assume that I am like Rilke and that I am a great genius, which I'm not, and to sit there and wait for this to happen, because what's going to happen is nothing. I know that. And I don't see any point in judging myself by this other man. I'm a different guy. I have to find the way in which I can write best and pursue it, and encourage other people to find their way, and not belabor them with my way. Again, when you're talking about young people, I think it's premature to talk about their careers. They are really just beginning. I don't know what you would have thought of the work of

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Wallace Stevens if you could have read it when he was 32. It wasn't even printed until he was in his forties.

Int: You published your first book, *On The Edge*, when you were 35, and it's a very solid book of poems. You show a lot of talent and craft in it. Your second book, *Not This Pig*, is more relaxed. Overall it's stronger and more varied than *On The Edge*. And then you came out with *They Feed They Lion*, which is a very demanding book to read. It's very aggressive and it's very good. Now you have another book coming out, called *1933*, which contains poems about your childhood. Is this book more mellow, now that you've gotten that fierceness out in *They Feed They Lion*?

Levine: I don't think this book is so aggressive. It's very different.

Int: That doesn't necessarily mean it's weaker, does it?

Levine: No, it doesn't mean it's weaker. It doesn't mean it's stronger either. [Laughter] It just means that it's different. It's a lot less aggressive in that way. There are a lot of poems in it which wouldn't have looked at all out of place in *They Feed They Lion*. In fact, there is a long poem which I considered using in *They Feed They Lion*. It seems very much to be written in the tone and the rhythm of that book, and it's the longest poem in the book. So I don't think there is a clear demarcation.

Int: If we can assume that you're improving all the time, it ought to be a very strong, powerful book.

Levine: I don't think I am. I don't think I'm getting any better. I may be, but I'm not sure. I don't think about that too much. I think that too is a trap.

Int: Maybe it's a question you can't answer.

Levine: I don't think it's a question of whether you can answer it or not. If you look back on the careers of poets you'll find that it's a very answerable question. But it's a trap. It's a question that we tend to force on ourselves, when by and large, it's irrelevant to what we're doing. What I'm trying to do is write the poetry of the feelings and experiences I now have. If I don't turn out to be a particularly good poet of middle age, well that's the way it goes. Wordsworth wasn't. He seems middle aged in his early poems. Curiously enough, he has that wise tone very early in his poetry. You'd think, God, when he got to middle age he'd be. . . . And then we look at Yeats and we see a great poet of middle age. You just do the best you can in any particular period, and I think it's a mistake to look back and say, "Oh shit, I've got to do those poems over again," or "I was better then than I am now." As I said, I think it's a trap that we tend to get ourselves into. I find it's not all that hard to avoid.

Int: Is it one poem at a time, then?

Levine: No, no. It's not one poem at a time. I get ideas that encompass more than one poem at a time, that almost reach out to the idea of a whole thing I

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want to write about, like *1933*. Not designs for other poems, but certainly great areas that I want to explore with poetry. This was true with *They Feed They Lion*. I often write on more than one poem at a time.

Int: You seem to be prolific. Are you?

Levine: Well, it's very different from one occasion to another. Sometimes poems come very quickly, in a great rush, and they're just there. I've written as much as a couple of hundred lines in a day, lines that I've saved and still like a lot. The longest poem I've ever written I wrote in about two days, and it's almost 400 lines. So at times I am very prolific.

Int: You have *1933* coming out in January. And then you're going to Spain in the spring, is that right?

Levine: Europe.

Int: Is that strictly for writing? Do you have something set, planned that you want to work on over there?

Levine: Oh, it's complicated. It's for a number of reasons.

Int: OK. Thank you.

Levine: Sure.

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Robert K. Martin

WHITMAN'S SONG OF MYSELF: Homosexual Dream and Vision

It has become common among critics of Walt Whitman to argue that the protracted debate over the nature of the poet's sexuality, whether he may have been homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual, is essentially beside the point. This argument has not been based on any reading of the poetry, but rather on the general modern and "liberal" tendency towards acceptance and tolerance. Acceptance and tolerance of homosexuality have not only been disastrous for the development of a homosexual consciousness; they have also led to a critical irresponsibility which seeks to equate all experience and to deny that homosexuals are "really" different from heterosexuals (to test the absurdity, substitute women and men, or blacks and whites).

Homosexuality shares a number of the general functions of all sexuality, but it bears a particular burden, given the social view of homosexuality and the virtual universality of repression of homosexual desires, at least in their most overt or public manifestations. The homosexual artist has a double need to express his sexual drives through his art because he is (or was) far less able than his heterosexual brother to give expression to these drives in his own life. In a society which attaches serious penalties to the open practice of homosexuality, the homosexual will often turn to art as a way of confronting those desires that he cannot acknowledge through action. Through the symbolism of his art he can communicate the facts of his homosexuality to his readers, knowing that those of them who are similarly homosexual will read the signs properly. Thus it was certainly with Whitman. He wrote a large part of his poetry directly out of his own sexual conflicts and fantasies, and he used his poetry to convey the news of his homosexuality to his readers. He knew that they were to be his "cameradoes," his only faithful lovers and only true readers, for all others would (Whitman predicted accurately) fail to see the "message" that would be unmistakable to some:

> *This hour I tell things in confidence,*
> *I might not tell everybody, but I will tell you.*
> (Song of Myself, sec. 19)

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WHITMAN'S (MIS)READERS

Whatever homosexual readers may have thought (and John Addington Symonds was but the first to have recognized Whitman's homosexual meanings; he has been echoed by gay writers from André Gide to Allen Ginsberg to any of a large number of young American poets all of whom take Whitman as a point of reference, exceeded by no other American gay poet with the possible exception of Hart Crane), Whitman's readers in general have made a sorry record of misreading Whitman's poems. If one is charitable, one can suggest that these readers were simply unable to see the homosexual meanings, which were so divorced from their own experiences. But I am not inclined to be charitable. The record of absolute lies and half-truths and distortions is so shameful as to amount to a deliberate attempt to alter reality to suit a particular view of normality. If Whitman is to be a great poet, then he must be straight. If the poetry shows something else, Whitman must be made to alter his own poetry, censor himself. Despite considerable concessions made by Whitman during the course of his career, and the removal of a number of passages, the rabid heterosexualists were not satisfied. Whitman's life must be betrayed, rewritten, and his poems reread in a "safe" manner. Whitman must be saved from himself.

The process of this creation of a new, false Whitman is so well known that I will not spend too much time recounting its details. But it is important to note the extent to which otherwise respectable and reliable critics went in their efforts to "clean" Whitman up. The first stage, the most overt, was directed toward biography, toward proving that Whitman was actively heterosexual in his personal life. In part this stage was provoked by Symonds' famous letter to Whitman and Whitman's equally famous (and comic) reply, in which he boasted of having fathered six illegitimate children. Whitman had played the role of good citizen, especially in his old age, despite the barely concealed friendships with younger men (which are discussed in some detail by Edwin Haviland Miller), and his older friends continued the fiction of his life. But the first critics were not content with such an absence of open homosexuality: they needed proof of heterosexuality. So the New Orleans story was invented, out of nothing but a desire to prove that Whitman was normal. And even otherwise sensitive readers of Whitman, such as Emory Holloway, William Carlos Williams, and Babette Deutsch, continued to believe in the story long after its total fictitiousness had been demonstrated. Doubtless many still do.

The case of Holloway was particularly disappointing since it was he who was responsible, in 1920, for revealing that the poem which seemed to give rise to the New Orleans story, "Once I Pass'd Through a Populous City," had been changed prior to publication by Whitman to alter "I remember only the man who wandered with me there for love of me," to "I remember only

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a woman I casually met there who detain'd me for love of me." One would have thought that such evidence would have been conclusive. But no, the New Orleans story blooms again whenever someone wants to refuse to believe that Whitman loved other men. Even those critics who must of course admit the textual evidence refuse to accord any significance to it: James E. Miller, Jr., in his important book on *Leaves of Grass*, published in 1957, commented, "Although Holloway's discovery may be biographically revealing, the poem has the 'meaning,' surely of its final version." How convenient when a new-critical principle can be used to buttress what is essentially nothing more than a refusal to admit an unpleasant truth! One wonders what argument would have been used if the homosexual meaning were in fact the published version—as is the case of virtually all the Calamus poems as well as of large numbers of poems scattered throughout the *Leaves of Grass*.

Many critics have at least been honest about this prejudice. Whitman criticism is full of the vocabulary of social opprobrium and the clichés of undigested psychoanalysis. Even homosexuals themselves have used words of scorn—Symonds says "symptoms of emotional abnormality" and Newton Arvin spoke of a "core of abnormality." Others have been more vicious. Mark Van Doren in 1942 was able to write, "Manly love is neither more nor less than an abnormal and deficient love."

Since that time the heterosexual attacks on Whitman have become more subtle, and perhaps ultimately more damaging. They have used sophisticated techniques of literary analysis to demonstrate that sexuality is not an important aspect of Whitman's poetry. The most insistent of these arguments is that advanced by James Miller, in his reading of "Song of Myself," for instance, as an "inverted mystical experience" (he didn't mean the pun on invert there). By seeing patterns of mystic symbolism (which is identical to erotic imagery, except that it does not mean what it purports to mean, but only uses sex to talk about God) at crucial points in the poem, Miller diverts the reader's attention from the poetry's frankly and directly sexual nature. Miller's argument at least had the virtue of making us look again at the "mystical" Whitman and making us return to the visionary poet; in the hands of his less talented followers, the arguments singularly lack charm, as in this recent example from Thomas E. Crawley's *The Structure of Leaves of Grass* (1970): "To associate it (These I Singing in Spring) with any crude, sensuous interpretation of the calamus-symbol is to miss the mystical beauty" or again "the gross interpretation . . . that the root is a symbol of the male sexual organ."

A recent, "liberated" version of Whitman's poetry illustrates the failure of the "liberal" reading. Walter Lowenfels' edition of *The Tenderest Lover: The Erotic Poetry of Walt Whitman* purports to be honest. Lowenfels maintains with pride, "Our text . . . is unexpurgated; erotic lines and passages

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that Whitman changed or deleted have been restored." But although the text is restored, the editor feels obliged to insist on the interchangeability of the sexes. He writes of the famous "Once I Pass'd Through a Populous City" text, "What is intrinsic to the poem is not the sex of the loved one but the love itself."

Such intellectual softheadedness is characteristic of this reprehensible edition which is only possible because of the critic's need to romanticize (i.e. render abstract) a sexuality which he finds distasteful. One can hardly expect much of anyone who can write such garbage as "Whitman was a prophet of today's sexual revolution . . . In his love poems, youth speaks to youth of all ages, across all centuries and languages." But he goes on to ignore crucial and obvious evidence, and refers to "the unnamed him or her whom Whitman identified only by the number '16' or '164.'" The rankest amateur in cryptography knows that Whitman meant P or PD, Peter Doyle.

The history of Whitman criticism in this connection is shameful. I can think of no parallel example of the willful distortion of meaning and the willful misreading of a poet in order to suit critics' own social or moral prejudices. And it must be added that the very few critics who spoke against this tradition of distortion were generally Europeans, who perhaps did not totally share American Society's total and relentless hostility to the homosexual. It is thanks to the work of Jean Catel, Roger Asselineau, and Frederik Schyberg that Whitman finally can be seen as a poet of sexual love between men. In the last few years there has been the important work done by Edwin Haviland Miller, which has unfortunately not received the attention it deserves (despite his overly normative Freudian bias). One begins to suspect that the history of Whitman misreading is not over.

Whitman's own life was marked by the same pressures toward sexual conformity that now lead to critical distortions. He seems to have felt the need to act out a role, to hide behind the mask of the tough. And he had to learn the strategies of concealment, strategies that, until recently at least, all of us had to learn in order to succeed as homosexuals in a heterosexual world. The changing of texts, the excision of passages, these are but the most obvious of what must have been an enormously painful series of acts performed almost daily in order to conform to someone else's version of normality. And how painful they must have been to the man who was able to give another man a wedding band, who from his youth on wrote with passion only of friendship between men, who cried out in suffering "O unspeakable passionate love" (Song of Myself, sec. 21) for the love, "the secret of my nights and days," which lay hidden "in paths untrodden."

One important consequence of his homosexuality is that Whitman, unlike so many male poets, does not see women as sexual objects even in his

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ostensibly heterosexual poems. Freed of the need to enslave the opposite sex, the homosexual is free to see women as human beings, and thus we find in Whitman a strong sense of compassion for suffering figures of women—the mother, the prostitute, the spinster. It is not only that he does not see woman as sex object, but that he can thereby see himself as self-enjoying. Whitman's poetry is frequently auto-erotic in the sense that he takes his own body as a source of sexual pleasure much as Freud's famous polymorphously perverse child does, and derives pleasure from his own orgasm, rather than from any sense of conquest or aggression.

Whitman makes no distinction between subject and object (a distinction necessary to the position of woman as "other" and as property). All experience becomes a part of himself—"Absorbing all to myself and for this song" (sec. 13)—as the total egotism of the child is restored. The "Song of Myself" is the song of the world, as seer and seen, male and female become one. If Whitman's vision is regressive, it looks back to an earlier ideal of play. We need to see the sensitivity, the *finesse* of Whitman, a sensitivity which has too long been obscured by the image of him as

> *Walt Whitman, A Kosmos, of Manhattan the son,*
> *Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding*
> (Song of Myself, sec. 24)

This was what Whitman wanted to seem to be; but the poetry reveals the happy truth that he was indeed a much deeper, more sensitive person than he dared admit.

WHITMAN'S DREAM—VISION POETRY

The great debate over homosexuality in Whitman's poetry has generally centered on the poems in the Calamus section or those poems which, although not actually placed in that section, seemed to belong there, by similarity of theme or imagery. But this emphasis is somewhat unfortunate for two reasons. First it tends to isolate the "homosexual" poems of Whitman into one neat category which can be labelled and then safely forgotten and put away. Second it tends to assume that Whitman's sexuality is only relevant to his most explicit and frequently didactic poems. On the (hopeful) assumption that most readers are capable of reading Calamus themselves, I have therefore preferred to center my discussion here on another mode of Whitman's poetry, which is perhaps slightly more elusive and yet which seems to me essential to an understanding of the whole body of his work. I refer to what I have called Whitman's dream-vision poems, those poems which are written in a state of

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the mind somewhere beneath full consciousness and which invoke the experience of the mind in that state.

"The Sleepers" has received a fair amount of attention in recent years, probably due to the general interest in stream of consciousness techniques and also to a new willingness to look more carefully at explicit sexual imagery. I do not wish to give a full reading of the poem here—one may be referred to the helpful comments of Leslie Fiedler and Edwin Haviland Miller in particular, as well as to the reading of James E. Miller—but I do want to look at it sufficiently to suggest that it is similar to "Song of Myself" in its sense of wavering consciousness, in its use of cosmic observation, in its shifts through time and space, and in its sexual imagery.

"The Sleepers" is explicitly about a vision, as the first line informs us, and its action is the movement of the poet within his vision,

I wander all night in my vision,
Stepping with light feet, swiftly and noiselessly stepping
and stopping,
Bending with open eyes over the shut eyes of sleepers,
Wandering and confused, lost to myself, ill-assorted,
contradictory,
Pausing, gazing, bending, and stopping.

The first section of the poem is agitated, marked by continual movement. The poet uses the game metaphor to depict the atmosphere of levity which prevails as the covers are lifted and the genitals are revealed.

wild-flapping pennants of joy!

It concludes with a remarkable depiction of orgasm, in which it becomes clear that the naked speaker who has been exposed is using his body as a metaphor for his penis and that the entire exposure motif of the poem operates on these two levels (the exposure of the poet for what he is—the fear of being revealed as a homosexual—and the exposure of the penis which may bring forth castration anxiety in a hostile world). The text is worth quoting in full, especially since Whitman later removed these lines from the 1855 edition and they are therefore not present in most of the editions regularly used.

O hotcheeked and blushing! O foolish hectic!
O for pity's sake, no one must see me now! . . . . my
clothes were stolen while I was abed,
Now I am thrust forth, where shall I run?

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Pier that I saw dimly last night when I looked from the windows
Pier out from the main, let me catch myself with you and stay. . . . I will not chafe you;
I feel ashamed to go naked about the world,
And am curious to know where my feet stand. . . . and what is this flooding me, childhood or manhood.
. . . . and the hunger that crosses the bridge between.

The cloth laps a first sweet eating and drinking,
Laps life-swelling yolks. . . . laps ear of rose-corn, milky and just ripened:
The white teeth stay, and the boss-tooth advances in darkness,
And liquor is spilled on lips and bosoms by touching glasses, and the best liquor afterward.

Miller manages to see vaginal imagery here, but I do not see it. It seems clear to me that what is being depicted is the act known politely as fellatio—the penis protrudes from the foreskin, the balls are sucked, the penis is sucked, and finally there is ejaculation in the mouth. The sexual experience is the starting place for the poem, and the poet begins his vision with the second section, after the orgasm when "my sinews are flaccid/Perfume and youth course through me, and I am their wake." The physical experience leads toward the spiritual experience which is the dream, and which is also in its turn physical and sexual.

The third section brings a fantasy of the destruction of the "beautiful gigantic swimmer," a warning in dream terms of the dangers in the unconscious world of the sea with its "swift-running eddies." The swimmer seems to be a sexual object, but is also an ideal presentation of the self. The dream of the third section is a dream of the destruction of the self—the clue lies in Whitman's surprising line "will you kill him in the prime of his middle age?" (Whitman was 35 at the time) and in the transition to the next section through its first line, "I turn but do not extricate myself." The poet-dreamer wants to escape from his dream, but the nightmare is not yet over. In another key passage that was omitted from later editions Whitman introduces his conflict with the Satanic through the figure of Lucifer (whom Whitman seems perhaps to have taken in his literal sense as light-bearer, for it is the coming of dawn that will destroy the dream and take away the lover, real or imaginary).

The theme of slavery is linked to the sexual by the sequence of the poem, where the poet moves from the mother's vision of the "red squaw":

My mother looked in delight and amazement at the stranger,
She looked at the beauty of her tallborne face and full and pliant limbs,
The more she looked upon her she loved her

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to his own identification with the black slaves. Both evoke guilt because of their (implicit) double violation of taboo: homosexuality and miscegenation are the twin crimes so feared in American thought. (And we recall that Whitman's famous letter implied that he had broken the lesser of the two, lest he be found guilty of the greater!)

Starting with section 7 there is a drastic change brought about by the poet's acceptance of the world, an acceptance which is possible through his perception of unity in space and time. The agitation of sexuality, the immediate sensation of guilt following it, and the fantasy of death and loss which accompany its completion give way to a sense of sexual calm and peace. The poet learns to accept the daytime world of disunity ("the rich running day") because it is part of the cycle which always leads back to the night and love and the Great Mother. His love of experience and diversity does not lead him to forget the world of unity and calm, but rather to accept both:

I love the rich running day, but I do not desert her
in whom I lay so long:
. . .
I will stop only a time with the night, and rise betimes.
I will duly pass the day O my mother and duly return to you.

Much as I am indebted to the thoughtful book of Edwin Haviland Miller (*Walt Whitman's Poetry: A Psychological Journey*), I must take issue with his particular emphasis on such a passage as evidence of Whitman's regressive patterns and what he implies to be an unresolved oedipal situation. I do not feel any *personal* maternal qualities in his poem. The mother addressed here seems to me to be a universal mother, goddess of the night, of the dream, of the vision, of all that is excluded from the daylight world of jobs, reason, and fathers. Reading the poem in terms of personal psychology seems to me to miss the essential significance of Whitman's vision, which achieves a return to a state of primal consciousness, which is pre-patriarchal, and cyclical rather than linear. His essentially matriarchal vision leads him to send the poet back to the Night-Mother (forces of darkness, mystery, and the unknown) to be reborn from her. The Mother is the death-sleep which follows upon the male striving of sexuality, but it is also the repose that heals and out of which the fallen penis may rise again:

Not you will yield forth the dawn again more surely than
you will yield forth me again,
Not the womb yields the babe in its time more surely than
I shall be yielded from you in my time.

The sexual experience is revealed by this poem to be the gateway to the

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visionary—literally because ejaculation leads to sleep and thus to dream, but metaphorically because it is the realization of the possibility of transcending the self through sexual ecstasy which leads to an acceptance of the world. As we fall off to sleep following orgasm, we are able to see a kind of inner sense in the world, a world freed from the pressures of the day and in which we have regained a kind of repose that Freud thought found its only model in intrauterine existence. Through that vision Whitman could come to his understanding of the world and greet all men and women as sleepers, each dreaming his own dream, but each dream like the others.

"SONG OF MYSELF"

Whitman's most important poem, in terms of length, and in terms of the themes broached there, is clearly his "Song of Myself." Critics have attempted to find an adequate way of understanding the poem's strength and sense of inner unity despite an appearance of disorder, but no one has fully explained the poem's patterns by looking at it in the light of "The Sleepers" as a dream-vision based on sexual experience. I would like to attempt such a reading now with the clear understanding that I am not denying any epic or mystic or democratic elements—they are clearly all there but they do not explain how the poem works, nor do they deal with any of the sexual structure.

The poem appears, at first glance, to be very unlike "The Sleepers" in that it seems to be the product of a wholly conscious mind which is engaged in a number of identifiable traditional poetic functions—e.g. singing, being an epic poet; debating, being a metaphysical poet. But a careful look at the poem will reveal that the poem is a monologue posing as a dialogue, or perhaps a dialogue which turns out to be a monologue. A dialogue for one speaker might be a nice way of putting it. The second role is clearly nonspeaking.

The mode of the poem seems to be a body/soul dialogue, such as those popular in the Renaissance, and known in American poetry through the example of Anne Bradstreet. But the body does most of the talking, the soul does not seem to respond, and the reader is addressed so often and so insistently as "you" that he indeed becomes a part of the poem. The poem is cast as a love poem; it involves a seduction, a growing desire which leads to final fulfillment and then to the vision which follows on sexual experience and which, as in "The Sleepers", permits the poet to perceive the unity of all things. The poem also ends with a sense of contentment brought on by acceptance but not until the poet has marked the end of the night by bidding farewell to his lover.

The structure of the poem is loose, but nonetheless clear if one follows

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the basic themes which are developed. I can only outline a few of them here and suggest their similarity to the patterns we have already seen in "The Sleepers." The first section is a very brief introduction, particularly in the 1855 edition, where it consists of only five lines which provide a setting and the argument. In the second section, the process of natural intoxication has begun. The poet concludes this section by asking the you-reader to "stop this day and night with me." It is clear that, in fantasy at least, the request is granted, and the rest of the poem is an account of that day and night. At this very early stage of the poem it is clear that the poet has a sense of acceptance—"I am satisfied" he writes—and that acceptance is based on the metaphor of God as the lover who sleeps with him by night, leaving him "baskets covered with white towels bulging the house with their plenty." In the scarcely concealed sexual symbolism of this section, the genitals are hidden by white towels, not unlike the "cunning covers" of "The Sleepers." It is the coming of God at night which gives the poet a "bulging basket" and permits him to accept the day in the knowledge of a forthcoming night and permits him to ask whether in fact he should

postpone by acceptation and realization and scream at my eyes,
That they turn from gazing after and down the road,
And forthwith cipher and show me to a cent,
Exactly the value of one and exactly the value of two,
and which is ahead?

In the world of nighttime vision there is no counting, one and two are the same, real and imaginary lovers are equal.

The poet continues his address to you, through the recollection of a previous sexual experience which is the source of his first knowledge of peace:

I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning,
How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd
upon me,
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged
your tongue to my bare-stript heart,
And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reach'd till you held my feet.

From this reminder of previous love and the insights it gave, the poet turns to the beginning of a new sexual experience, which begins with undressing of the you; "undrape!" Once undraped the loved one is subject of one of the most interesting passages of this poem, section 8, which depicts the progress of life through sexual metaphor.

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The little one sleeps in its cradle,
I lift the gauze and look a long time, and silently brush away flies
with my hand.

The youngster and the red-faced girl turn aside up the bushy hill,
I peeringly view them from the top.

The suicide sprawls on the bloody floor of the bedroom,
I witness the corpse with its dabbled hair, I note where the pistol
has fallen.

From childhood to adolescence to death; from birth to reproduction to death; from the "little one . . . in its cradle" to the "bushy hill" to "the bloody floor . . . the pistol has fallen." The sight of nakedness leads in visual terms to a realization of death and suggests the ambivalent attitude toward the male genitals. But it is crucial to see that if one "cannot be shaken away" then one must accept all. He must accept the penis beneath the foreskin, the erect penis, and the penis after coitus. The acceptance of these three stages can lead to an acceptance of the same three stages of life and thereby to an acceptance of life as a whole in all its multiplicity, and so the second half of this leads to the first catalogue, and we begin to understand the meaning in Whitman's work of the catalogue—the expression of ultimate unity of things seen not on their surface but seen *sub specie aeternitatae*, a point of view that for Whitman was best arrived at through a sexual experience.

The following sections of the poem go out, literally, into the world and lead, for instance, to the celebrated section 11, where the abstract vision of section 8 is transformed into a very specific vision of masturbation.

Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,
Twenty-eight young men and all so friendly;
Twenty-eight years of womanly life and all so lonesome.

She owns the fine house by the rise of the bank
She hides handsome and richly drest aft the blinds of the window.

Which of the young men does she like the best?
Ah the homeliest of them is beautiful to her.

Where are you off to, lady? for I see you,
You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in your room

Dancing and laughing along the beach came the twenty-ninth
bather,
The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved them.

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The beards of the young men glisten'd with wet, it ran from
their long hair,
Little streams pass'd all over their bodies.

An unseen hand also pass'd over their bodies,
It descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs.

The young men float on their backs, their white bellies bulge
to the sun, they do not ask who seizes fast to them,
They do not know who puffs and declines with pendant and
bending arch,
They do not think whom they souse with spray.

This poem, or part of the poem, is exquisite in its evocation of the mood of sexual arousal. As many readers have pointed out, Whitman achieves the feat here of being both subject and object, of being the woman voyeur, and also of being the men who are masturbated. Not only is this one of the loveliest sexual poems I know, it is also a clear defense of the anonymity of sexual encounter. In the dream-vision of Whitman there are no persons, but rather a general feeling of the delight of sexual experience regardless of the partner. They are totally tactile, since they take place in the dream-world of closed eyes. The experience could well be repeated in almost any steam bath of a modern large city. But the important point to see is that not asking, not knowing and not thinking are integral parts of Whitman's *democratic* vision, and anonymous sexuality is an important way-station on the path to the destruction of distinctions of age, class, beauty, *and* sex. Whitman loves all being, and will love, and be loved by, all being. It is perhaps at this juncture that the implications of Whitman's perspective become most revolutionary.

The sense of universality of experience leads to the long catalogues of the following sections, which introduce the transitional sections 21 and 22, concerned with the yearning for love. In section 21, Whitman returns to his Body/Soul division to express his desire to return to the bodily. He concludes the section with the line I have quoted earlier

unspeakable passionate love

and then 2 lines omitted in later editions but which make the sexual male marriage metaphor clear:

Thruster holding me tight and that I hold tight
We hurt each other as the bridegroom and the bride hurt each other.

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The sense of growing desire and longing culminates in section 24, where playing gives way to direct phallic arousal, and introduction of the calamus theme. The sperm is risen up:

You my rich blood! Your milky stream pale strippings of my life.

As the poet imagines himself making love, his assertions become bolder. He refuses the stigma that society may attach: "What we do is right and what we affirm is right." The imagery becomes more violent as he asserts his right to homosexual love:

Unscrew the locks from the doors!
Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!

All that is hidden must be exposed; there must be no secrets, in this metaphor strikingly similar to the more modern "Out of the closets into the streets!" As his ire increases, the blood and sperm rise, he introduces his calamus symbol ("Root of washed sweet-flag, timorous pond-snipe, nest of guarded duplicate eggs") as a metaphor for his own genitals, and he is able to sing all of the body, with penis and sperm ("Your milky stream pale strippings of my life"). The extraordinary crescendo of section 24 is based in sexual ecstasy and reaches its culmination in a sexual climax: "Seas of bright juice suffuse heaven."

And yet suddenly the passage comes to an end with the apparent arrival of the dawn, which would destroy the night. The reference is at the same time ambiguous, since the physical dawn would end the nighttime vision, but the day-break of sexual ecstasy would show the poet the possibility of ultimate victory over the day through his sexual powers.

Dazzling and tremendous how quick the sunrise would kill me,
If I could not now and always send sunrise out of me.

We also ascend dazzling and tremendous as the sun
We found our own my soul in the calm and cool
of the daybreak.

Man can make his own sunrise and thereby master the natural world and escape the necessity of the cyclical pattern—recalling the first sexual experience, section 5, which also took place in the morning. Making love in the morning seems to break the tyranny of the day.

The next few sections record the poet and his playful reluctance to give in, to let himself be brought to orgasm, a coyness which is ended by rebirth of section 28.

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Is this then a touch? quivering me to a new identity,
Flames and ether making a rush for my veins,
Treacherous tip of me reaching and crowding to help them,
My flesh and blood playing out lightning to strike what is hardly
different from myself,
On all sides prurient provokers stiffening my limbs,
Straining the udder of my heart for its withheld drip,
Behaving licentious toward me, taking no denial,
Depriving me of my best as for a purpose,
Unbuttoning my clothes, holding me by the bare waist,
Deluding my confusion with the calm of the sunlight and
pasture-fields,
Immodestly sliding the fellow-senses away,
They bribed to swap off with touch and go and graze at the edges
of me,
No consideration, no regard for my draining strength or my anger,
Fetching the rest of the herd around to enjoy them a while,
Then all uniting to stand on a headland and worry me.
The sentries desert every other part of me,
They have left me helpless to a red marauder,
They all come to the headland to witness and assist against me.
I am given up by traitors,
I talk wildly, I have lost my wits, I and nobody else am
the greatest traitor,
I went myself first to the headland, my own hands carried me
there.
You villain touch! what are you doing? my breath is tight in its
throat,
Unclench your floodgates, you are too much for me.

This most extraordinary passage is almost certainly a depiction of anal intercourse, in which Whitman has turned the entire physical experience into mythic proportions and sees himself reborn as he takes into himself the seed of the unnamed lover. The cycle is complete, the sexual anticipation is ended through fulfillment, tension gives way to satisfaction, and the pattern we have now come to recognize is again present: the orgasm is followed by passages of philosophical summary and visionary perception of unity.

Something very similar happens a few sections further on, in section 32, when he turns to the stallion, symbol of the male lover. But the poet who in section 28 was the so-called passive partner in anal intercourse has now become the active partner as Whitman makes vivid the banal sexual metaphor of "riding" someone.

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A gigantic beauty of a stallion, fresh and responsive to my caresses,
Head high in the forehead, wide between the ears,
Limbs glossy and supple, tail dusting the ground,
Eyes full of sparkling wickedness, ears finely cut, flexibly moving.
His nostrils dilate as my heels embrace him.
His well-built limbs tremble with pleasure as we race around and return

Thus again the sexual leads to the visionary, in this case to the famous section 33, where the poet is "afoot in my vision," recalling the first lines of "The Sleepers."

This vision, like those in "The Sleepers," includes the negative, for the poet is not able to separate sexuality from guilt. Death images are pervasive and culminate in his vision of himself as a crucified victim, in section 38. His racial memory includes all experience, and all suffering. He becomes a sacrificial victim, taking upon himself the sins of the world, and thereby assuring the safety and the sleep of his beloved. Reborn like the resurrected Christ, he can begin his journey across the continent—"Ohio and Massachusetts and Virginia and Wisconsin and New York and New Orleans and Texas and Montreal and San Francisco and Charleston and Savannah and Mexico"—and beyond. He recognizes that his poetic mission will be carried on by his élèves, the poet's disciples, who can learn the meaning of his words only if they have followed out the sexual patterns of the poem and have in fact become the poet's lovers. He is now awake but lets the other sleep:

Sleep—I and they keep guard all night,
Not doubt, not decease shall dare to lay finger upon you.

He carries his message of salvation, his Christ-like role to the world and feels certain of the correctness of his mission. Thus assured, he awakens the lover in section 44. "It is time to explain myself—let us stand up." He realizes that he has escaped the trap of reality through the acceptances, including that hardest of all to accept, Death. But once he has accepted it, and acceptance was already implied in section 8, he is already out of time and out of space (to quote Poe, who sometimes seems surprisingly like Whitman). Having achieved that state of ascension, he can now say good-by to the lover, recognizing his transitoriness. The recognition of death means that no earthly love is final; that all lovers will part; and so he parts from his lover, prepared to give himself to the world rather than to any one individual. He cannot take this lover with him, but must ask him to make his own journey.

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Not I, not anyone else can travel that road for you,
You must travel it for yourself

. . .
I kiss you a good-by kiss. . .
Long have you timidly waded holding a plank by the shore,
Now I will you to be a bold swimmer
To jump off in the midst of the sea. . .

Having made love, learned about the world, and then bid the world adieu, he is calm again, he has found happiness. Characteristically Whitman's image is physical and sensual:

Wrench'd and sweaty—calm and cool then my body becomes,
I sleep—I sleep long.

It is only after the experience of sexual gratification, achieved through the dream, that the visionary experience becomes possible. It is the euphoria of the satisfied lover that gives rise to Whitman's poetry of vision—the poems of realization of unity. Its needs fulfilled, the body expands to encompass the world, through its physical embodiment of the lover, who in his role as "other" is the world. One can accept the death of the world only after transcending unitary death, escaping beyond the fear of the "little death" into a realization that all death brings resurrection, that the penis shall indeed rise again.

* * *

Homosexuals are a constant affront to the society, because they demand to be defined in terms of their sexuality. The homosexual has no existence as a group unless it is through sexual preferences and experiences. He cannot be wished away with the thought that such matters are of no importance, or with the piety that all human experience is basically similar. Whitman's poetry, particularly "Song of Myself," shows how the poet translates his love for the world, his cosmic promiscuity, into a myth of the wandering lover seeking his partners in all places and at all times. The visionary is rooted in the sexual, and Whitman will not let his root be torn out. He remains what he is for those who will read him, despite all that has been done to him. He can be secure in the knowledge he spoke of in "Scented herbage of my breast" and which we have seen to be fundamental to his other poems as well:

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Every year shall you bloom again, out from where you retired
you shall emerge again;
O I do not know whether many passing by will discover you or
inhale your faint odor, but I believe a few will;

. . .
Do not fold yourself so in your pink-ringed roots timid leaves!
Do not remain down there so ashamed, herbage of my breast!
Come I am determin'd to unbare this broad chest of mine, I
have long enough stifled and choked;
Emblematic and capricious blades I leave you, now you serve me
not
I will say what I have to say by itself,
I will sound myself and comrades only, I will never again
utter a call only their call,

Out of the cycle of the penis is born the cycle of the soul; out of his erections, ejaculations (the pun is crucial), and re-erections comes Whitman's faith in a cycle of the world which will comprehend and conquer death. The real sleep is the sleep of the contented lover who will not die.

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Leonard Kriegel

GOING HOME

Ultimately, the boundaries expanded. But I always find myself beginning with Bainbridge Avenue. To the east, Rochambeau Avenue; west of Bainbridge, 206th Street. On one side, friends; on the other, strangers. A line of demarcation between them. Bainbridge Avenue was my no man's land. Maps are drawn that way between nations, too. And it was Bainbridge Avenue that stood between the block-long apartment house called Niles Gardens and the small apartment house on 206th Street to which we moved when I was eight.

The house on 206th Street had no name, only a number. It didn't have an elevator either. The apartment houses with names had elevators. Legions of contractors descended on the North Bronx after the First World War and endowed their work with names—names carved into cornerstones, names boldly lettered forth from entrance awnings, names cut into the iron grillwork, names fingered into cement walks. Some of the houses had carefully tended shrubbery guarded by plaster of paris lions in their "courtyard" entrances. On Mosholu Parkway, there was even a house which boasted a large circular pond in which fat goldfish indifferently swam. Not even watching the fish could make me comfortable on the Parkway. The Parkway offended my sense of history. Too much grasping there.

I was four when we moved from the East Bronx to Niles Gardens. And I loved it from the first. I loved the long lobby that seemed to run on interminably. Whooping like an Indian, I would run its length, then vault the bannister by the flight of stairs that fed into the center hall. I practiced hook sliding in my socks on the marble floor, alert for the ever-present threat of the superintendent-owner or his black handyman, Joe.

A working-class tenantry in a working-class building. But all of us, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, filled with a sense of moving up, our futures ripe with expectations. What we needed was opulence. We needed the holiday darkness of the Loew's Paradise on the Grand Concourse—its painted star-lit sky and stuffed baroque toilets posing as refined a splendor as

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existed in our world—on those memorable "occasions" when the sensual expectancy remained in the nostrils long after all else had faded. Visions of paradise, clouds floating across the deep-blue darkness, a rallying of adventurers in the Bronx. Even the lobby of Niles Gardens had its imitation medieval battle flags and stuffed red-velvet chairs and a heavy oak table. The window fleur-de-lis called forth the Prince Valient in each of us. We could play at being crusaders, even if we were not Christians.

Niles Gardens had a back entrance, too. Actually, it was no more than a wide walk but children and adults alike called it "the backyard." Beyond that, an empty glass-and bottle-strewn lot ran the length of the block, until it dropped twenty feet into the cyclone-fenced yard at the bottom of the hill. The yard belonged to the Episcopalian church which fronted Bainbridge Avenue. In the less treacherous part of the lot, where it had been more or less levelled, we played baseball and punchball; in the part that had been left rocky and treacherous, we played cowboys and Indians. In winter, we went belly-whopping over the rock-and bottle-strewn terrain on make-shift sleds. There was a small brick embankment into which we would steer. If you missed the embankment, you plunged ten feet down into the ditch. In the fall, we roasted potatoes over hot coals embedded in the rocks. Sometimes we spent hours trying to melt down the cheap lead soldiers you bought in the five-and-ten. Lead or potatoes, the smell of smoke and the brisk chill of approaching winter promised more than our failures could deny.

Niles Gardens was where I made my first emotional investments. I had friends there, the security of hallways and stairwells I knew even in the dark, a known territory. And I had my cousin Leo, two years older than I was, reluctantly serving as the older brother I wanted. But even at the age of eight, I knew that the people who lived in Niles Gardens were provincials, that we did not count for very much beyond Rochambeau Avenue. Niles Gardens, no matter how much I loved it, was hardly suitable for streets that memorialized *this* America's past. Still, if our skirmishes with history were minimal, at least they were ours. We weren't the destiny that the nation wanted, but we could claim a destiny. That was something.

Niles Gardens took me into the world. I first learned about death there. We had our suicide, an old man whom we children called "Turtle Soup." Dry, angry face, drooping gray walrus mustache, a cane that was carved and gnarled as if it had been cut for a European executioner. He was a German Jew. There weren't many German Jews in the neighborhood. Those that there were kept their distance. We used to torment Turtle Soup as he slowly walked down Rochambeau Avenue. We would run about ten feet in front of him, taunting him, watching gleefully as he raised his cane to slash the air. Our relationship to him was personal, and we took his suicide as an indictment. He

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threw himself out of a third floor window. He was very old, in his eighties, and he landed in the tree in the backyard under which we boys used to test our summertime courage in game after game of "knucks." Our bleeding knuckles, his broken body. It took them an hour to get him down. We stood underneath the tree, the silence and his opened eyes and rhythmic heavy breathing an even greater accusation than screams would have been. They brought him to Montefiore Hospital. It took him four days to die. We talked about his suicide for the rest of that summer. Crazy Lester shimmied up the tree and cut a ridge where the old man's head had nestled in the branches.

I am seven years old. The game is hide-and-seek and I am running breathlessly. The johnny pump at the bottom of the hill on Rochambeau Avenue is home base. I swing around the block, run up Bainbridge Avenue, wave to the owner of the liquor store with the giant black clock on its front, then turn past Mr. Levy's candy store, climb the iron fence, carefully avoiding the spikes, and drop into the lot. I prowl through the rocks, momentarily forgetting the game of hide-and-seek as I hunt for Indians. The April air is soft and pleasant. Aware of the imminent danger of capture, I eye the rooftop of the Bainbridge Avenue stores. I would like to climb onto the roof by shimmying up the waterpipe running above the ditch, the way my cousin Leo and his friends do. But I am afraid. No one has climbed the roof before he is nine. A broken glass bottle lies nestled against the side of a rock. I kick it. The burnished metal is beautiful, the barrel exploding into concentric circles that testify to the validity of the future. I am afraid to snatch it up, afraid it will disappear in a puff of smoke. Finally, I seize it. I hold it in my right hand and point it at the four o'clock sun and squeeze the trigger. I stroke the burnished metal. Then I run through the lot, waving the gun in the air. I climb the fence, then move rapidly through the yard, taking the iron flight of stairs that leads to the corridor to Rochambeau Avenue three steps at a time. I guiltily eye the minister's garden with its giant yellow tulips, then emerge into the Rochambeau Avenue sunlight, howling my good fortune in the direction of the hydrant.

Events outdistance me. I will not feel the envy of my friends today. Butch's brother has been run over by a laundry truck. He followed Butch across the street, darting between two parked cars. Butch is *it*. His job is to ferret us out.

Fortune turns sour. I hold the gun in my hand, ashamed of my new-found wealth. A man kneels over Ira's blanket-covered body in the middle of the street. A cop stands above him. The kneeling man is bald and his fingers rack his scalp like pincers on a bowling ball. He sobs, rocks back and

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forth on his knees. One of the women pats him on his head. "Not his fault," I hear. Suddenly frightened, I search for my mother. She is standing in the circle of women. They have surrounded Butch's mother, a woman with distant, vacant eyes. Butch's aunt is smiling. She says "Jesus" over and over again, and I remember that Butch's mother and aunt are Christian Scientists. I do not know what a Christian Scientist is, but I know that for a Jewish woman to become one brings upon her my mother's unbridled contempt. I have heard her speak about Butch's mother and aunt to my father. "Not even real *goyim*. Not like in the old country. Even *goyim* don't believe in such nonsense." But my mother stands in the circle of women. An obligation. There are rules for suffering. Betrayals of history are put aside for the moment.

My grandmother sits on her milk crate and holds my brother. My brother is not yet three and he is trying to pull away from her, determined to get to my mother. My grandmother holds him firmly. I show my grandmother the gun. "Look what I found, *baba*." Annoyed, my grandmother shakes her head. She is not interested. No one is interested in the gun. I turn and trot slowly back to Bainbridge. I climb the fence once again and re-trace my steps through the lot. I nestle the gun in among the rocks. I would like to cover it with broken glass bottles, but I cannot find one nearby. I kick mounds of dirt around the gun, burying it. I would like to come back here tomorrow and discover it again. But I know that I won't.

Niles Gardens held no history for my father. In any case, he did not need to locate himself in history. History was all he had ever known. And now his history was tied to that of his wife's family. A closed fate. My Uncle Harry's wife, my Aunt Dvorah, died a year after my father came here. She was my father's sister and she died of cancer and my father, trapped and alone, jumped into the open grave at her funeral. My grandmother memorialized his grief. Kriegels were more emotional than Breittholzes. That was understood. But my father reached into his sister's grave to rescue some part of himself, to be the man his shtetl Europe had promised. They pulled my father out and they buried my Aunt Dvorah.

My mother was Uncle Harry's sister. After Aunt Dvorah died, Uncle Harry and his three young children moved in with us. A succession of Bronx apartments until we arrived at Niles Gardens. My grandmother ruled. Beneath her, my Uncle Harry, my Uncle Morris, my father, my mother, and then the five children, each of us half-Kriegel, half-Breittholz. It was a crowded apartment, but the lack of privacy disturbed my cousin Sylvia and my cousin Millie more than it did Leo or me or my brother. The way we lived, though, that galled my father. The four of us slept in one large room. But it wasn't the lack of space alone that got to him. By 1941, his life in Niles

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Gardens seemed an indictment. Nine years in America and still a boarder. A man needed his own place, a prerequisite for dignity. Living with his mother-in-law, my father still had to look on himself as a *greener*. His worth was impugned each day he remained here. An apartment that was ours alone, no matter how small, was a kind of liberation. By 1941, it was the best my father could hope for.

It was not only the lack of his own place. Both of my uncles worked in the fur market and by 1941 they were making good money for the first time in their lives. My father, meanwhile, moved from one backbreaking job to another, glued by destiny to a series of penny-ante appetizing stores. My father always compared himself to my Uncle Morris. Uncle Morris was our American. He was not yet eleven when he came to this country and he went to school for two years before my grandmother sent him to work as a messenger in the fur market. But he learned fast, and at thirteen his Americanization was already complete. A bachelor, an excellent handicapper, he dressed sharply and expensively, especially in the Forties, when the furriers were among the highest-paid workers in the country. "Hitler, that poddler, he made it so all these other poddlers can buy mink coats from my boss. The son of a bitch." Draping his skinny frame in meticulously tailored suits, he clothed his politics in an aggressive class-consciousness. He used to come home from the fur market with the *World-Telegram* in one hand and the *Daily Worker* in the other, the one to maneuver the line at the track, the other to maneuver the world. He would feed me stories about his gambling which he somehow managed to end on a note of working-class uplift. He came back from his first winter vacation in Miami with a small jackknife that had a picture of a blue lagoon and the words "Miami Beach" stamped across its side. "Nothing is too good for the workers," he said as he handed it to me.

Uncle Morris was a militant member of the militant fur workers union. My father belonged to a union of wholesale and retail clerks. The furriers had been working a forty hour week since the great strike of 1926. In 1941, my father worked sixty-two hours a week in a small Jerome Avenue market, for which he was paid $39. It was hard, sometimes back-breaking, work. He opened the store, prepared the counter displays, lifted heavy cartons of canned goods to stock the shelves, rolled the huge pickle vats carefully out onto the sidewalk, all the time trying to con the customers into one more ounce of lox or whitefish. His fingers were already stitched and scarred from where he had cut them. By 1941, he had given up the dream of owning his own store. He had wanted a store of his own because that, too, had promised him the dignity for which he hungered. Two years earlier, the old man who owned the small appetizing store on Bainbridge Avenue had offered it to my father. "I'm old, going blind, got to get out. For $500, Kriegel, and dollar for dollar on whatever stock I got." My father asked my uncles to lend him the

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money. My grandmother swore away her soul if my uncles lent him the money and my uncles shrugged their shoulders. My father raged in silence, then went to his own uncle, who now employed ten men in his own fur manufacturing business. "From me, you don't get a penny," my father's Uncle Julius announced with finality.

Only the apartment of his own remained as a possibility. One Sunday morning in September, 1941, he announced to my mother, "We're moving." He spoke in Yiddish, then turned to me and said, "It's time, no?" It was as if he were seeking my approval. "After they sign the last contract, $39 a week. For what I do, oats for a horse. It's natural. You're a worker, you're an animal. Still, it's enough. Our own place." He turned back to my mother. "No more with the mama. No more with the brothers. By my general, I'm a horse. By them, you. For what? You ever got a 'Thank you,' a word praise. 'After lunch, take the children to the park,' Harry says. He goes to Lakewood and you take the children to the park. His children. The general gives orders. To hell with it. We move."

Years later, he told me that he stayed in the neighborhood because my mother insisted on being near my grandmother. "*Baba* was the strong one. The others, like air." My father did not like his mother-in-law, but he respected her. He never tried to tamper with the love his sons felt for her. Like her, he had cast his lot with the shtetl. He wanted to be a modern man, but he was trapped by the past. What else could he do but wrap his soul in defiance?

His world was limited. And he knew it. His life, his fierce sense of being a Jew—what else did he have to stave off the confusion that bubbled all around him? "The first job I had in this country, that already showed me the way it was. Comes six o'clock Friday evening, I take off my apron. 'Where you going?' the boss asks. 'It's almost *shabbos*.' He laughs. 'You go now, Kriegel, you don't bother coming back.' 'Tomorrow too?' 'Tomorrow. What's special from tomorrow? You be here.' What can I tell him? I don't come in, he gets someone else. It's 1932, the Depression. It's not hard to find a man what'll be glad to do his shit. *Shabbos* is for greeners. I work till twelve that night. Then I go home. I think I'm going to vomit. Mama tells me not to go back. 'Don't worry,' she says. 'You'll get something.' Where? It's 1932, mama's pregnant with you. I'm a husband, a father. Who else will provide? So I go in *shabbos*. All day, I think I'm going to vomit. It's crazy. Old *babas* walking along, smoking, shopping. I never saw nothing like it. I want to scream at them, 'In America you learned?' The boss hears a word, he'll fire me. So I choke on it. I work like a horse. I finish two o'clock Sunday morning and he gives me my pay and I go home and I cry. First time since I'm a kid. With one hand, America gives. With the other, takes. Another year and I'm also smoking *shabbos*. Money they give you. All else they take."

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He had no idea of how it worked or for whom it worked, but my father loved this country more fervently than anyone else I have ever known. Maybe because there was so little else on which he could count. The union? Better than nothing, but not enough. "In 1937, I'm making $16 for a seventy-five hour week. Comes the union, $23 for sixty-two. They're also crooks. But on my side." His sons? We loved him. He knew that. But he must have also known that we had already learned enough to feel ashamed of his inability to master this America. On Saturdays, he still worked from eight in the morning until midnight. The furriers and garment workers no longer worked on Saturday. They leaned against the railing overlooking the backyard lot and watched us play baseball and smoked their cigarettes. For them, America was becoming home.

There were few ways in which my father could define himself. He was neither revolutionary nor gambler; he knew nothing about baseball; he rarely went to the movies because he had no time and he did not understand the value of what Hollywood had placed before him; he was not particularly suited to being an American. Man, husband, father, worker, Jew—in his own words, "a horse." That was what history had bequeathed him. There was little for him to do but accept what had been meted out. Better here than what had already happened to the two brothers he had left behind in Poland. Better this than Hitler.

It was no more than the length of a football field between the backyard of Niles Gardens and 315 East 206th Street. A few weeks before we moved, my father went down and registered me at the Mosholu Jewish Center Talmud Torah. "You'll go to *chaida*. You've got to learn." Tuition was $80 a year. My father shook his head; he could not afford it. "You're a real Jew, Mr. Kriegel," the rabbi said. "We'll take him for nothing." My father shook his head again; he could not afford that either. "I'll pay $40," he said. "Take for nothing," the rabbi said. "No more, no less," my father insisted. "He's my son. He has to learn."

I would have preferred going to the Yiddish *volkschule* near Reservoir Oval. Hebrew was distant and mystical, and I already felt a very unAmerican affection for Yiddish, a language which I associated with my grandmother, with socialism, with a rough-and-tumble immediacy of flesh rubbing against flesh. My father was determined. I was to be absorbed into the faith of my father and of his father before him and of his father's father before him down to generations out of memory but not out of history.

The Mosholu Jewish Center stood on Hull Avenue, between the Parkway and Bainbridge. I went there every afternoon at 3:30. Either I walked down

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Bainbridge or I ran down Perry. There were a number of Jewbaiters on Perry, boys whose older brothers or uncles might have run with the Bund when it organized a small group of superpatriots on Webster Avenue. It didn't bother me too much, except in the winter, when the snowballs would be packed around stones. Jewbaiting was a group activity. On Bainbridge, I could walk. The only place on Bainbridge I learned to expect trouble was outside the five-and-ten near the corner of Hull. A group of Irish boys, between seven and twelve in age and five to eight in number, used to hang out on that corner. The first time I walked past them, carrying my blue Hebrew writing book, a sudden silence descended.

Sometimes, I would see them waiting for me on the corner and I would turn into the Five-and-Ten and browse through the aisles. The Five-and-Ten didn't hire Jews, but I liked the loose chunks of chocolate that were kept in the front stalls and I would take special pleasure in stealing as much of it as I could. I was never caught, even though I would sometimes steal the candy under the salesgirl's nose. I stole other things, too—airplane glue, lead soldiers, combs, shoelaces. Sometimes, I would simply throw whatever I had stolen in the trash can outside the bowling alley on Hull Avenue. The store was *theirs* and I felt no guilt about taking from *them*. It was the first time I had ever thought of people as a single combatant. Christians rather than Italians or Irish or Germans.

"Hey, Jewboy." The opening usually came from the skinny boy with stringy arms. He was the youngest. "You going to the matza store, Jewboy?"

Silence. At the heart of a man's courage, a degree of caution; at the heart of a child's daring, a degree of measurement. An older brother leaning against the car. Even if I held my own, I would ultimately pay double for a minor triumph.

"Let's see where they cutcha, Jewboy." A different voice.

"What's in the books, Jewboy?"

"Matzas, matzas, two for five, that's what keeps the Jews alive." Sing-song voice of the skinny one. But the threat was distant.

"Move your ass, Jewboy," said the one leaning against the car. "Move it."

I moved. Degrees of danger. Measurements to discover new boundaries. I tried to keep to a purposeful, disdainful gait. But not so disdainful that they would come after me. A greater knowledge coming home, questions of the blood disrupting an innocence that must have been deliberate, even at the age of eight.

And yet, on 206th Street, I grew to like the Irish. I managed to survive that first winter in our new home, the drawn light in the New York sky testifying to my endurance. Run the gauntlet and come through. Friendships

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open up. It was the Irish who introduced me to roller hockey. From one end to the other, they scarred the street's asphalt. I was welcomed in the games. We played in an atmosphere that could best be described as absolute. In Niles Gardens, ability in sports was important; here it was total. Not even in schoolyard basketball games have I seen the dedication with which we skated between manhole covers. The melancholy of late winter twilights was made personal by the fierceness of the skating, the silent exultation with which we witnessed realities fall into place. A goal! In the chilled air, music from someone's radio. Sweat freezing to the skin. In baseball, sweat ran free. "Freeze your ass, Lennie?"

"Yeah." A difficult game. Hands stinging from the raw wood where the shellack had been peeled down, eyes glued to the black taped puck being maneuvered down your side. And then sticks crashing together, the struggle for balance, the puck disappearing somewhere behind you as you banged into the parked car and hurtled the curb on your skates. A game that threatened anarchy. An Irish game, seeded by the geometry of the city.

It was not a game I really liked. But it was a way of working myself into favor with the boys on 206th Street. I still remember those twilights, something long and narrow and expectant in the air. In the dimming February light, no time to worry about questions of the blood. Home from *chaida*, I would play until long after darkness set in and my mother called me upstairs for dinner.

But if I learned to like the Irish, I could never understand them. Later, I would glibly ascribe it to the way the church had hammered their sex into celluloid. No juices, no pleasure. But that was too easy. Still, even at nine or ten, the conversations about sex were dreadfully out of balance. The terror of the actual had been stuffed in every hollow that god allowed. Frankie Andrews, aged eleven, equating the mortal terror of masturbation with the death of his soul. A candle snuffed out in darkness. Frankie himself seeking the thin edge of grace which separated "wet dreams" from the dreaded pits of "jerking off." Christ in his infinite mercy demanded payment only for consciousness. Consciousness alone made one a victim. Visions of hell reverberating in every finger-fronted sentence.

"You're crazy," Dominic says. "You start that shit, you'll drive everybody crazy."

"No," Frankie insists. "It's a sin against god. Don't you see?"

"My balls. You think god is watching what you do with your cock? You think he ain't got better things to do?"

"You'll pay. Everybody has to pay."

* * *

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By 1948, flush times came to the Bronx. The young people had long since been bored by their parents' memories of the Depression, bored with all of the past. For us, there was no scarcity of prospects. The country was waiting for our maturity, fat, ripe, and promising. Walk down the street and eye the girls' legs and the drabness disappears in a Hollywood splendor. Love like a butterfly's wings, speckled gold and black. Our world was not the world of our fathers. A glimpse of grandeur existed for all men. For us, too.

The working class was something you came out of. But you didn't talk about it, because this was America and even with an uncle who read the *Worker* there was a certain shame about your own father's failure to keep his eye on the main chance. By the time I was fifteen, I had already adopted my heroes—Debs, Sacco and Vanzetti, Big Bill Haywood. The world was a simple affair, its lines clear and observable: the screwed and those who screwed them. Simplistic enough. Still, if you didn't make it, you were a failure. The contempt I felt for "bosses" in general could be transformed into anger at my father for never having become a boss. Not that his life would have significantly changed. Nor mine. Few millionaires emerge from counter displays of Novia Scotia salmon. But I wanted him to walk through the glowing entrepreneurial light of this America even as I cursed it. A boss was like a landlord. He made decisions for others. People were in his debt, not he in theirs. Supplicants to his will.

I wanted not money but liquidity, the power to convert my own inner urgings. "Be your own man," advised my father. "A professional. Don't depend on them. On any of them." A country's tyranny could be in what it claimed from you. To identify wholly with the working class was to drive oneself into a corner. The dread suspicion of not being able to measure up, of lacking the talent to deal with the aspirations this America had created. I needed a wider world, a more substantial vision. The dreariness, the lack of vision, the sense of limitation that one was expected to accept as his own, the thousand and one ways in which these provincial streets testified to our fear of failing, of being left behind. What you were was what you struggled to get out of, like a caterpillar fighting to emerge from its pupa, struggling to claim its rightful wings.

And it was not furriers or appetizing clerks who were destined to devour the goodies of this world. *We* didn't know enough. Our minds had been tuned to the pitch of a shallow consumption. We groped in the dark. What we needed was a vulgarity so vast that Park Avenue matrons would vie to capture neighborhood studs for their own. An awesome prospect. But we didn't know how to sell what we were.

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It is a warm Sunday in May, 1944. In a week, I will turn eleven. In less than two months, I will be in the hospital trying to stay alive, while the doctors wonder whether the virus will settle for my legs or will claim the rest of me, too. But now I am in a taxi with my uncle and Mr. Kravitz, his friend. I love riding in taxis. Uncle Morris tells the driver where to go. He doesn't ask, he tells. We are heading for Yankee Stadium and I am happy.

But first we stop at a small candy store between Jerome Avenue and the Concourse, a few blocks north of the Stadium. My uncle tells the driver to wait. "Why are we stopping?" I ask. Mr. Kravitz takes my hand and escorts me into the candy store. He fishes in his pocket and pulls out a fistful of pennies. I count the pennies. Seventeen. He hands them to me. Then he pulls me over to a pinball machine set up in the shape of a baseball diamond. "Play," he says. "All you want." He and my uncle walk to the back of the store and are joined by another man. I play the machine. I can hear them discussing the odds. Mr. Kravitz comes back. "You want a drink?" Without waiting for my answer, he orders a chocolate egg cream. Uncle Morris returns to us. I drink the egg cream. The other man is sitting at the end of the counter jotting the transactions down in a small red looseleaf pad. I have eleven pennies left. "Keep it," Mr. Kravitz says.

"What did you bet?" I ask.

"Both games," Uncle Morris laughs. "And on the Giants and Brooklyns, too. Only you don't tell *baba*. Understand."

"We'll win," I say, privileged to share in the world of men.

"We," Mr. Kravitz snorts. "Look, he made himself a partner."

"Why not?" my uncle says. "Why not him, too?"

I spend the afternoon dividing my attention between what is happening on the field and what is happening on the scoreboard. The Yankees take both games from the Red Sox, whom my uncle insists on calling "the Boston Americans." The Dodgers win their first game; so do the Giants. I look at the scoreboard as we leave the Stadium. My uncle looks down at the grass. In the second game, the Dodgers are one run up in the bottom half of the ninth; the Giants are tied at the end of the seventh. The air breathes the richness of possibility. I hold my breath. Uncle Morris and Mr. Kravitz discuss the different combinations. They have already won big, for they have bet each game individually. But if the Dodgers and Giants each win the second game, it will be a six team parlay and they will have made a killing. The Dodgers win. The Giants are beaten in the last of the ninth.

The candy store anchored the neighborhood and one entered its door with the knowledge that he had come to the neighborhood's center. On the

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corner of 206th Street and Bainbridge, flanked on one side by the Fordham bus stop, on the other by the Jerome Avenue bus stop. Beneath it, the last stop on the D train. Independent Line. Sandow & Israel, owners. Proprietors in America. The adolescent boys slouched against the green wooden and tin newspaper stand, casting their collective courage at the feet of young women returning to the neighborhood after a day at "business." The boys were students, not yet in the "real world." The women worked. Tired secretaries and receptionists and stenographers and salesgirls emerging from the subway with a jaunty step, strong breasts challenging the soft woolen sweaters, their willingness for verbal combat easily matching our daring. The air cloying, the perfumes too sweet. "Mama, mama, look at the boobs on that one. Hello, Alice." Body bending across our rigidity to grab a *Post* or *World-Telegram*. A smile, a wink, and just enough body show to force us back into our silence.

No matter how often Jack the counterman mopped it, the candy store floor was dirty. Linoleum had been placed over the white hexagonal tiles, but it cracked and broke away. But no one minded the dirty floor. The store bustled with activity. Here ambitions were announced, plans formulated, men and boys laid siege to possibilities. Neighborhood voices made their demands—cigarettes, *The Sporting News*, egg creams, a huddled conference with Pete the Bookie who used the last of the three telephone booths as an office, the dip and flow of men discussing the track line, the ethnic juices of Jewish cabbies and Italian bus drivers. Man against man, tribe against tribe, language like an unsheathed knife, the restless anticipation with which the neighborhood staved off the threat of summer nights.

A repository for the neighborhood's legends. Feats of strength and daring passed from mouth to mouth, each time embroidered in the telling. Observations of the actual—the frozen smile on Polo's childish face as he hands his money over to Pete the Bookie, an eighteen year old hustler suffering from an excessive love of money. A bad disease for a gambler. The horseplayers knew that money was fortuitous, a symbol of the action, not the action itself. "Polo," says my cousin Leo, "I'll make a *mensch* of you yet. The day'll come when you hand your money to Pete like a goddam king. Money is for dying, Polo. All you want is to enjoy the action. You're alive. At best, you're a little loser."

No one was above letting a tip go. "I have thirty dollars here, Dave," says the old priest as he stands in front of the cigarette counter to pay for the *Journal-American* he has just taken. "Collected from my two fledglings at the parish." He hands the money and a piece of paper to Dave. "Across the board. A parishioner's suggestion." The priest leaves. Dave studies the paper, fingers the money, then walks over to the counter where my uncle is sitting. He shows my uncle the piece of paper.

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"Well," he says in Yiddish, "what do you think?"

"O'Brien give him. What does he know?"

Dave shrugs. "He speaks with god."

"Don't be an idiot. I wouldn't bet him counterfeit money if I got my own printing press."

"My luck is dead the last few weeks," Dave explains. "I got to do something. What can it hurt? It's worth thirty to him, it's worth sixty to me." The horse finished sixth in an eight horse race.

To outmaneuver the system was everyone's desire; to indict it and then lick its lollipop was another thing entirely. They were small-time gamblers. They lacked the courage to plunge, to risk their total substance. Something always held them back. They were weighed down with considerations—family, rent, clothes. They bet because they could not see very much else that would enable them to claim victory. They bet because it was enjoyable, a clean suspense, because their egos dried out when the considerations were too much—too much family, too many dulled prospects, too much of the drab. An explosion of energy went into handicapping the horses. All of it staked on the quick hit, the sudden turnover, the gasp of a working-class mentality as it envisioned the small entrepreneur making it big. Fortune. Harlem had its numbers and 206th Street had its horses. *Amerika goniff!* the old men laughed. The money was a way out, a passage through the wilderness.

"Why did they bet?" I ask my uncle years later.

"Because they were hungry," he says. "Because they got nothing else. What did Benny the Hack have? Or Lester? Or that *meshuganah* Irishyer who used to try to pull out of me what no one could possibly know. Or me? What else did I have? Charley Harris told you I was the best handicapper in the neighborhood. You know what 'best' means, Lennie? It means that in a given year you look like a winner. You pay ten percent for your entertainment. You dream of a big hit. And the funny thing is, they give you . . . here, there, they give you. One afternoon, Lennie, I remember it was the Saturday Assault won the Belmont, I walk out of there with five thousand in my pocket. A year's salary. I give it back in a week. With interest."

Notes for the two dollar window. The virus of penny-ante gamblers. My uncle taps the trunk of each tree he passes as he walks down Rochambeau Avenue, the second and third fingers of his right hand ritualistically twisted together. He taps each tree twice. In his other hand, he holds the *Worker*. The imagination beckons. Gambling is an alternative to the class struggle he now suspects is no longer coming. To hit big, to seize a certain glamour from life. The flats, the trotters, baseball games, basketball, football, the fights at the

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Garden every Friday night. Action. When the horses don't run on Sundays, the men lock themselves in the apartment of Hymie the Nose to play poker and gin rummy. Coffee, cake, sandwiches—dollars on the kitchen table. Long Sunday afternoons and the money changing hands, the killings in the air.

It is 1951. I am nineteen years old. I am standing on the corner on a hot August afternoon. The stillness of Bainbridge Avenue begins to swell with anticipation. Another hour will bring the rush of people returning from work. I lean against the subway exit and study the face of Pete the Bookie who is sitting on the green newspaper stand, next to a pile of New York *Posts*, face raised to the sun. Pete does not sweat. The toothpick is in his mouth, the tight black hair nestled to his scalp. He is still thin, but he is beginning to develop a pot, which looks glued to his frame. A bookie's diet: starch. Italian with a Jewish wife. Starch. Dead face, languid eyes, no sweat. A caricature of a bookie in the movies.

"Why do you book, Pete?" I ask.

The languid eyes open slowly. The toothpick makes a full circle in the mouth. An iguana in the sun. "I provide a service. They hit me, they get even with the whole world. It's a service. It's something."

"You bet yourself?"

"Why not? You think a man books, he got more brains than his customers?"

A black Buick Super pulls up to the curb, sliding in ahead of the Jerome Avenue bus. The bus surrenders to opulence and moves past its signpost. A man in a black suit gets out of the Buick. He is wearing white gloves. Another man with white gloves and a black suit is behind the wheel. I want to laugh. The man with the gloves walks over to Pete and slaps him hard. Pete's head jumps back and the man with the gloves catches Pete's head on the ricochet with his hand. Then he turns and gets back into the car and the car drives off. The bus driver stares at Pete, as do the few passengers. We are all embarrassed. The corner of his mouth has been cut and he spits out a fragment of toothpick red with blood. His face is blanched, a dry white, the color of the handkerchief he holds to his mouth.

That night, when I walk over to the corner after dinner, Pete is nowhere in sight. There is no action. He has left for Florida. Three months later and he is back on the corner. His face is still languid, impassive. An iguana. Looking at him, you understand why people enjoy hitting him for a winner. It is not just the money.

He never again forgets to lay off his bets. He never fails to pay off. There have been too many complaints. Pete's employers are as careful of their

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reputation as any respectable retailer. Investments in reputation must be earned. "You got to understand," my uncle explains. "*They* got to win. They know it. It's always a percentage on a season for them. The long run. So what is Pete? A runner. Their telephone man. Him they don't need. Him they buy and sell like my boss buys skins. You understand, it's percentage? They got to beat me. I know it. But if I think they're going to take my money even when I beat them, when I give their man a horse and after the horse comes home he tells me he couldn't phone the bet in, am I going to bet with their man if they do that? Like hell! Am I crazy? Business is business. When you come down to it, they're more honest than any manufacturer I've ever known. Listen, they can afford to be. They got to win."

There are motions of the spirit here, too. On the corner of 206th and Bainbridge, America is doing its work, tightening our souls, molding, shaping, branding, stamping us. I can understand the hunger which sends them scurrying to the trotters at Yonkers evening after evening. They are Americans now.

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Neil Schmitz

DESCRIBING THE DEMON: The Appeal of Thomas Pynchon

> When we look at this display of passions, and the consequences of their violence; the Unreason which is associated not only with them, but even (rather we might say *especially*) with *good* designs and righteous aims; when we see the evil, the vice, the ruin that has befallen the most flourishing kingdom which the mind of man ever created, we can scarce avoid being filled with sorrow at this universal taint of corruption: and, since this decay is not the work of mere Nature, but of the Human Will—a moral embitterment—a revolt of the Good Spirit (if it have a place within us) may well be the result of our reflections.
>
> Hegel, *The Introduction to The Philosophy of History*

Given all the evil, the vice and the ruin that has befallen the world set forth in John Hawkes' *The Cannibal* (1949) and William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959), and again in Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1969), Hegel's remark seems an apt introduction to contemporary American fiction. Certainly *this* kingdom, the "last, best hope of earth," has stopped flourishing and its writers, confronted decade by decade with the spectacle, show all the signs of moral and philosophical exasperation. The "Good Spirit" rarely speaks in their fiction and its tone is ironic when it does speak. It has lost an eye in wartime Poland and since then taken the Apomorphine Treatment. It whistles a thin tune in the dark of postwar history. As Hawkes explained in 1962, his moral stance is to have no stance. Only the writer who "maintains most successfully a consistent cold detachment toward physical violence . . . is likely to generate the deepest novelistic sympathy of all," he wrote in *The Massachusetts Review*, "a sympathy which is a humbling before the terrible and a quickening in the presence of degradation." What animates Hawkes in this essay is his admiration for Djuna Barnes' comic treatment of violence in *Nightwood*, her stylistic equipoise in the face of Unreason, and finally he elevates the cool elegance of her writing to the status of an existential leap. He too believes in fiction, "hard, ruthless, comic" fiction that finds "a

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language appropriate to the delicate malicious knowledge of us all as poor, forked, corruptible, the feeling of pleasure and pain that comes when something pure and contemptible lodges in the imagination—I believe in the 'singular and terrible attraction' of all this." History in such fiction no longer exists as a coherent formation of events. Neither Hegelian nor Marxist, it has no destination, no implicit meaning—it is only a place, an environment, a theater in which everything happens and where, before flats that signify 1918ness or 1930ness or 1945ness, this "poor, forked, corruptible" Everyman enacts our common and immutable fate. Yet how often can these horrors be rehearsed before the terrible becomes merely the exotic, before the writer himself begins to participate in the alienation of the humane? It is a question Alfred Kazin asked in examining Jerzy Kosinski's *The Painted Bird* and one that Susan Sontag recently rephrased in contemplating the photographs of Diane Arbus. For the artist, however, whether Hawkes or Arbus, hardness is not so much a mode as an ethic, the ethic of the survivor who uses ironic detachment as a shield against the overwhelming data of his own immediate history. When Hawkes humorously knocks off the sole good man in *The Cannibal*, an inept schoolteacher named Stintz, braining him with his own tuba, he expresses the truth that after Paschendale and Verdun, after Dresden and Hiroshima, there is no rebirth, and at the same time he refuses the burden of hope. "To have humanism," Fausto Maijstral reminds us in Thomas Pynchon's first novel, *V.* (1963), "we must first be convinced of our humanity. As we move further into decadence, this becomes more difficult." The question in that modern art which strives to represent this mangled world is not, then, historical, Hegel's question: "to what principle, to what final end these enormous sacrifices have been offered," but rather the question so relentlessly stated by Burroughs in *Naked Lunch*: what *is* human?

In Pynchon's fiction the obscene so finely wrought in *Nightwood* and sparingly told in *The Cannibal* is epically extended and retold. Like Hawkes, Pynchon writes novels that are "hard, ruthless, comic," fiction that reveals exactly what is done when the hook is surgically removed from a Jewish nose or how in castration the scrotum is clenched and the testes spilled. But the most intense suffering that occurs in his fiction is intellectual, not physical, and in this regard Pynchon is the most violent of our modern writers, typically amassing great volumes of knowledge in specific detail only to mystify and confound the obstinate knowers who search in his texts for the right reading, for the true interpretation. He is interested not in those who operated the ovens at Dachau but in those who devised them, in those systems and technologies that enabled the Eichmanns, gave them timetables and switches to pull. All the enigmas painstakingly left unresolved in *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) are resumed and massively rephrased in his most recent novel,

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Gravity's Rainbow. Characters recur (notably Mondaugen and Weissman from *V.*), themes and motifs recur, anarchic parties begun in the short story, "Entropy" (1960), reconvene, there are historical and geographical intersections, Henry Adams and James Clerk Maxwell are once more recited, and Tyrone Slothrop, recognizably doomed, undertakes in this novel the same quest that harried and frustrated Herbert Stencil in *V.* and Oedipa Maas in *Lot 49*. But to conclude from all this evident continuity that Pynchon still coolly inhabits the world projected in the earlier fiction is to misread the significance of *Gravity's Rainbow*.

The first two novels are essentially Melvillean masquerades in which Pynchon himself operates as the confidence man. They are, in effect, positionless, centered only by the movement of the questions asked. In *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon moves from poised inquiry to statement. "Jamf was only a fiction," Slothrop finally realizes, "to help him explain what he felt so terribly, so immediately in his genitals for those rockets each time exploding in the sky . . . to help him deny what he could not possibly admit: that he might be in love, in sexual love, with his, and his race's death." Slothrop is finally abandoned, thrown away as the protagonist, and in his place Captain Blicero (Weissmann transmogrified) speaks with a compelling directness. When we first meet Weissmann in *V.*, he is a German officer stationed in Southwest Africa during the twenties, a Nazi sympathizer spiritually in transit from Roehm's SA to Himmler's SS—simply another version of Hawkes' cannibal, Zizendorf. Magnified as Blicero in *Gravity's Rainbow*, he is a protean figure, the keeper of the Rocket's secret, the secret Slothrop finally in fear and trembling apprehends. It is Blicero who supervises the creation of the Rocket, who launches it to rise and struggle with the gravitational pull of the mundane. "I want to break out—to leave this cycle of infection and death," he asserts at the end of the novel. "I want to be taken in love: so taken that you and I, and death, and life, will be gathered, inseparable, into the radiance of what we would become. . . ." As we shall see, this rhapsody of transcendence does not celebrate the profuse richness of the world, its teeming *thereness*, nor does it propose, as one reviewer suggests, a "defense against suicide." Blicero is not a Pierre Bezukhov yielding at last to the round wholeness of the compossible. He sings instead a very old Cathar song, the "white" song sung by the "wolf of Pontus," Marcion, by his disciples Tatian and Apelles, and most importantly by Manes.

From the start Pynchon has played knowledgeably with the Manichean perspective in his writing, spelling it out on numerous occasions, but always stating it as the probable, as a thesis, the curious strain that runs through Calvinism and which becomes curiouser and curiouser as history leans on its New Jerusalem. In *Lot 49* Oedipa is told of an obscure band of seventeenth-

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century flesh-despising Puritans, the Scurvhamites, who were ultimately all seduced by the Demiurge and brought over into darkness. In *V.* there is a "Bad Priest" who teaches the young girls in Malta "to become nuns, avoid the sensual extremes—pleasure of intercourse, pain of childbirth," who similarly advises the boys "to find strength in—and be like—the rock of their island," telling them that the "object of male existence was to be like a crystal: beautiful and soulless." Children are readily drawn to a Manichean conception of the world, it is noted in *V.*, particularly children who must deal with the inexplicable cruelties of war. The allure of Gnostic and Manichean thought in Pynchon's writing is obvious. For the Manichean stands outside history, free, not at all surprised by the evil he discerns in this sublunary world. In *V.*, while the revolt of the Bondelswaartz swirls around him in Southwest Africa, Kurt Mondaugen steadfastly pursues his scientific experiment with sferics (atmospheric radio disturbances), quixotically trying to decode a message from the random crackling. The time is 1922, but this revolt has occurred before, at the beginning of the century, and it will recur all over Africa, Asia and Latin America. Bombing the poorly equipped Bondels, the Germans rehearse for Guernica and Rotterdam. Inside Foppl's farm, where a continuous orgiastic party is maintained for the duration of the conflict, the colonials frolic like decadent Berliners. Outside their walls an entire race is exterminated. Is there a suprahuman language spoken in the ether, an utterance that, once transcribed, will either judge or justify this barbarous spectacle? Weissmann steals Mondaugen's logbooks and graphs, playfully interpolating his own interpretation into Mondaugen's disguised theological quest. In creating this world, the horror that surrounds Mondaugen, what did God mean? Weissmann's decoded text breaks down into two readings: GODMEANTNUURK and DIEWELTISTALLESWAS-DERFALLIST. Placed in this specific historical context, Wittgenstein's statement: "The world is all that the case is," becomes a chilling oracular response, at once a confession of the circularity of language and a relegation of the human to the natural. In Weissmann, who is portrayed as a transvestite, the heresiarch makes his traditional appearance. Like his predecessors who interpolated and excised the Gospels (Marcion cut from Luke all reference to the physical generation of Christ and Manes simply took what he needed from the Scriptures and synthesized it with Zoroastrian texts), Weissmann is a deft exegete, the exemplary shape-shifter. And in *V.* he already belongs to the great heresy of our era, Fascism, a movement that begins conspiratorially—not unlike the Trystero System that beguiles Oedipa in *Lot 49*.

Not all the confusion in this important novel is contrived. In the Trystero symbol of the muted post horn Pynchon ambivalently renders at once the notion of resourceful and healthy subversion (the breaking of a postal

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monopoly) and the silencing of the phallus, the silence of inversion and death. For if the enigma of the Trystero System compels Oedipa to recognize a world larger and more significant than her own, demands that she realize otherness, its sign, the muted post horn, is also the chosen emblem of the Inamorati Anonymous, an odd fellowship of solipsistic exlovers who have forsworn passion, who deny the value of the other. Oedipa's Sphinx is a mysterious and aptly named American industrialist, Pierce Inverarity, whose riddle, a puzzling will, requires that she enter history to resolve it. Thus she sets out to discover the nature of her inheritance, but where is the correct entrance, whose theory of the past truly explains what happened and what is happening? She encounters a series of couriers, a series of texts and messages (most notably a cryptic Jacobean play, *The Courier's Tragedy*) whose diverse meanings are at once indefinite and equivalent, reducible only to the Wittgensteinian proposition in *V.* The text of that ambiguous play, strewn with double meanings and strange allusions, will say whatever she wants it to say, so she is told at one point, but this is not what Oedipa wishes to learn. Like Melville's Pierre Glendinning, she desires to be embraced by the truth, whether dark or radiant, and in that embrace escape the isolation of private and relative meaning.

It is system-making, the thinking and writing of history, that concerns Pynchon in *Lot 49*. Like the Abbé Breuil in the caves at Altamira or Alexander Marshack in those at Pech Merle, Oedipa tries to read the writing on the wall, but in her case the writing is on the wall of a john in southern California or spray-scrawled on traffic signs. It is, seemingly, a futile quest. All the clues and signals given her do not lead to her demystification. The plot of *Lot 49* does not unravel. Like an old Hollywood serial, the novel merely breaks off at a climactic moment, suspends itself in the midst of mystery. The tragedy of the courier is compounded by a double deceit. We cannot trust the veracity of his information nor can we trust ourselves. That play and this fiction finally constitute the same text, the text rewritten as it is read: Kinbote's *Pale Fire*, Menard's *Quixote*. Interpreting Oedipa's interpretation, the reader is drawn into her enchantment. But how is this maze constituted? Using as his paradigm the postal system devised by Francis von Taxis in the sixteenth century, a system that soon cast its network across the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Italy and Spain, Pynchon invents an antagonistic system, the Trystero, a synoptic heretical and revolutionary underground that intercepts and subverts the official system of communication. Discourse in the form of the document is thus fatally compromised at its source (both historically and artistically) since its intentionality is always questionable. Who speaks in this letter, a fat and prosperous Tirolese burgher or a frantic concealed member of the Trystero? Because it determines the transmission of language, the sending

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and receiving of information, the postal franchise is clearly the most important in human society. The Postmaster (like the Roman Catholic Church imposing Latin on the Swabians, the Danes and the Franks) has the ability to define and structure consciousness itself. But the mails are always blackmailed. Following the advice of Burroughs to cut up and fold in, the phone phreak insinuates himself into the Bell System and speaks to a puzzled bonze in Cambodia. Pynchon knows the fate of Latin in southern California. Yet there is no solace to be found in the proliferation of idioms or cults since each idiom inevitably aspires to become Latin, to monopolize discourse. In *State and Revolution* Lenin declares: "To organize the *whole* national economy on the lines of the postal service, so that the technicians, foremen, bookkeepers, as well as *all* officials, shall receive salaries no higher than a 'workman's wage,' all under the control and leadership of the armed proletariat—this is our immediate aim." And *this*, Pynchon seems to suggest, is what constitutes the unholy dialectic of history—a struggle for the post office, the right to be the godlike Postmaster who impersonally operates in society like Maxwell's Demon sorting molecules in its closed, two-chambered box. Each would-be Postmaster dreams the death of history, the stasis of an even temperature eternally balanced by a perfected social system intelligently regulating its energies without losses, without decadence.

In *Lot 49* Oedipa is finally directed to John Nefastis, the inventor of an experimental Maxwellian box. "Communication is the key," he informs her. "The Demon passes his data on to the sensitive, and the sensitive must reply in kind. There are untold billions of molecules in that box. The Demon collects data on each and every one . . . the sensitive must receive that staggering set of energies, and feed back something like the same quantity of information. To keep it all cycling." Since the work of the Demon parallels Oedipa's in the novel, it is often argued that the Demon metaphorically describes the function of the imagination which strives to create order in the world. Yet as Anne Mangel points out in her useful essay, "Maxwell's demon, entropy, information: *The Crying of Lot 49* (*TriQuarterly*, 20, Winter, 1971), the Demon is a part of the problem, not its resolution. Maxwell had imagined a vessel divided into two portions, the temperatures of which would be raised and lowered without an entropic expenditure of energy by an ingenious exchange of swift and slow molecules, a theory later challenged by Leo Szilard and Leon Brillouin who argued that the Demon would require visual illumination to make its selection of molecules and thus necessarily increase the rate of entropy. And indeed the more Oedipa sorts and selects in her attempt to bring Inverarity's estate "into pulsing stelliferous Meaning," the more diffuse and disparate grows the evidence. In effect Nefastis has created a microcosm of the world, an idea of history. Oedipa makes the

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mistake of identifying with the Demon, she wants to be the "dark machine in the center of the planetarium" projecting the universe, whereas in fact she is inside Nefastis' figurative box and a part of its flux, a sensitive Oedipa sorted rather than sorting, sent rather than sending.

As all his critics have noted, Pynchon's application of the second law of thermodynamics to the modern world generally follows the thesis advanced by Henry Adams in *The Rule of Phase Applied to History* (1909). History is subject to the rule of entropy, Adams argues, and is therefore intensifying its processes as it approaches its apocalyptic close, piling event upon event in the last wild thrashing of human time. In Pynchon's interpretation, however, this thesis is subtly turned. As it appears in *V.* and *Lot 49*, history is, if anything, a vile invention specifically designed to interfere with the random exhaustion of human energy. By constantly devising (through its lesser demons) totalitarian systems of mediation, institutionalized versions of the Demon, it seeks to keep the social world of men going. History is *not* natural, but an imposition of human will, a rebellion. The Hegelian Idea of Freedom that ostensibly answers our questioning gaze when we turn from the "slaughter-bench" of history reveals itself in *V.* (and most powerfully in *Gravity's Rainbow*) as the perverse Adversary, the Idea that impels Europeans into Africa to hound the ahistorical Hottentots up out of their holes into consciousness, into awareness of the master/slave relationship. What obsesses Pynchon is not the entropic end of history, but the spectacle of historical repetition. And in rendering this vision he refers us to John Adams, not Henry Adams, the John Adams who diligently studied the political science of Machiavelli. How does a state escape the turning historical wheel that generates aristocracies out of monarchies and democracies out of aristocracies, turning again and again, toppling innumerable Romes? The constitution Adams envisioned stabilizes that endless and bloody round, serves as a perpetual motion machine demonically checking and balancing political exchanges of power. It is the essence of the American Dream, the perfect social contract, an agreement based on synchronic principles and yet open to diachrony. And through the operative intelligence of that text, a constitution fashioned to sense political disequilibrium, America brings history to its poised culmination—the wheel turns no more. James Clerk Maxwell is not only an important physicist, but also, in the contrivance of that theoretical box, an American poet.

Yet the constitution fails, yielding to the corporate bylaws of GM, the governance of Yoyodyne, an aerospace firm whose original business was the construction of gyroscopes for children. As Christianity hardens into orthodoxy, it engenders heresies; as the Taxis postal system begins to monopolize discourse in the post-Renaissance, the Trystero System emerges as its counterforce; so, too, does Pierce Inverarity's technological, IBM-

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controlled America constantly create its conspiratorial other. In its presence as an abstraction, the Demon broods like the Gnostic Demiurge over all this cyclical, circular, and ultimately absurd molecular behavior, this Sisyphean labor of the secondary demons, the incessant rut of their desire. The Idea of History is the Idea of the Demon. Thus Oedipa sits passively inside the box of American history at the end of *Lot 49*, waiting to be acted upon, waiting for the Demon to come and cry her fate. She is also inside the box of her body still looking at the world through "dark green bubble shades," still a captive maiden in the tower of her being looking for the "knight of deliverance." How, then, is she to be released? In *Lot 49* Oedipa's knights are all self-effacing, suicidal, men with muted horns. They have nothing to tell her. Driblette, the enigmatic director of *The Courier's Tragedy*, vanishes into the steam of a shower stall like the Cheshire Cat and is seen no more. Her husband, Mucho, is maddened by the omnipresent sign of the National Automobile Dealers' Association, a sign that "said nada, nada, against the blue sky." And nothing is the utterance of the cryer in this fiction which breaks off before the cry is heard.

In *Gravity's Rainbow* the "knight of deliverance" appears: Blicero, the suprasexual fashioner of the Schwarz-gerät, the black apparatus that will enable the V-2 rocket to break free of gravity and enter the realm of radiance. Yo-yoing like Benny Profane in *V.*, Slothrop wanders through the novel, an escaped pawn in the technological chess game of the Second World War. In his search for the meaning of his fate, as he tries to find an elusive and mysterious rocket, a particular rocket cryptically noted in captured SS manifests, he becomes increasingly irrelevant, increasingly ludicrous, finally a cartooned figure—Rocketman in a pig mask. Pynchon turns savagely on him, this typically American Ishmael, because in effect it is the typically American Ahab, Blicero, who now commands his attention. This disconcerting shift in narrative focus has confused many of the novel's readers, turning them into amazed and nervous Starbucks. Walter Clemons advises in *Newsweek*: "Pause, try to understand, and when you fail, move on, trusting in Pynchon who is a visionary artist in superlative control. . . ." The ruined landscape Slothrop traverses in this narrative is the same landscape, more or less, that appears in *Nightwood* and again in *The Cannibal*, the landscape of nightmare awake and realized in the world. He encounters the same chaotic mingling of disordered social classes, swims through the same thick sea of sexual perversion. But *Nightwood* is profoundly elegiac. If its cruelties and horrors are minutely rendered, the novel presents at the same time a mythopoeic sense of life as the life corrupted, the life lost. It mourns the loss of our Edenic animality, the original body through which we come polymorphously into the tragic alienation of self-consciousness:

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> Sometimes one meets a woman who is beast turning human. Such a person's every movement will reduce to an image of a forgotten experience; a mirage of an eternal wedding cast on the racial memory: as insupportable a joy as would be the vision of an eland coming down an aisle of trees, chapleted with orange blossoms and bridal veil, a hoof raised in the economy of fear, stepping in the trepidation of flesh that will become myth; as the unicorn is neither man nor beast deprived, but human hunger pressing its beast to its prey.

And while it is true that *Nightwood* concludes with Robin Vote, the eland-woman, on all fours, debased, imitating a rabid dog, the force of this conclusion depends on the measure we have been given, that luminous creation myth.

There are passages in *Gravity's Rainbow* where Pynchon writes with a similar grace and lyrical precision. The long meditation that occurs when Roger Mexico and Jessica visit a small church in Kent on Christmas Eve is simply a *tour de force*, superb prose, a discourse that figures the conjunction of an incoming V-2 and the twinkle of the Christmas star:

> Lower in the sky the flying bombs are out too, roaring like the Adversary, seeking whom they may devour. It's a long walk home tonight. Listen to this mock-angel singing, let your communion be at least in listening, even if they are not spokesmen for your exact hopes, your exact, darkest terror, listen. There must have been evensong here long before the news of Christ. Surely for as long as there have been nights bad as this one—something to raise the possibility of another night that could actually, with love and cockcrows, light the path home, banish the Adversary, destroy the boundaries between our lands, our bodies, our stories, all false, about who we are: for the one night, leaving only the clear way home and the memory of the infant you saw, almost too frail, there's too much shit in these streets, camels and other beasts stir heavily outside, each hoof a chance to wipe him out, make him only another Messiah . . . while here in this town the Jewish collaborators are selling useful gossip to Imperial Intelligence.

But the measure in this passage is not really given, the interpolated phrase, "all false," undercuts Roger's longing, and what fills the meditation, what impels it forward, is Pynchon's loathing for the continuity of the obscene in history, the overwhelming sense that it has always been thus, always as dire. The only stars that speak in this firmament are those that come crashing down to explode in our faces. So wicked is the world depicted in *Gravity's Rainbow*, so burdened with lunacy and despair, that indeed it deserves to be ended. In this regard, the novel's final section, "Counterforce," deserves close scrutiny. For it is here that Slothrop sinks, an unredeemed Ishmael, that Blicero fires his last significant rocket, the 00000, and Pynchon clarifies his primary metaphors.

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Although the plot of *Gravity's Rainbow* is not easily summarized, its general outline can be sketched. One crowded narrative line traces Slothrop's peregrination through the last years of the war into the beginning of the postwar period, a journey that takes him from London (where the rockets are falling) to Peenemunde (where the rockets are built and launched). This particular arc of the plot mordantly describes in its multitudinous events and sub-plots, its tales within tales, the chaotic, conspiratorial, strife-torn world of the historical, the world of the preterite. An esoteric branch of British Intelligence dominated by an obsessed Pavlovian scientist, Edward Pointsman, detects a correlation between V-2 strikes in London and the random scores of an American officer (Slothrop) who has placed stars on a map in his office to indicate the places where his seductions prospered. He is sent to France (without understanding the nature of his mission) to be used as a human dowser, set loose and then followed as he erotically senses and tracks down a mysterious rocket the Germans have assembled, possibly the rocket whose mysterious Schwarz-gerät is a rudimentary nuclear device. A maniacal behaviorist who resembles Dr. Benway in *Naked Lunch*, Pointsman is an exemplary would-be Demon, the omnipotent transmitter sorting, sending and controlling human (and historical) behavior. Like his SS counterparts in Dachau and Buchenwald, Pointsman has no scruples in experimenting with human subjects. At "The White Visitation," formerly an insane asylum, he has assembled a research team that combines psychics and psychologists, white and black magic, whose single-minded purpose is the pursuit of control. Pointsman looks beyond their immediate task, the knowledge and prediction of the unknown, that inexplicable rain of flying bombs, and envisions a world that looks very much like B. F. Skinner's Walden Two, the earthly paradise of a benevolent concentration camp. In this account Pynchon retrieves all the punning and word play he had exercised in *V.* on the concept and institution of Intelligence. The bureaucratic conflict and the career-making that embroils Pointsman's establishment in constant turbulence mirrors the actual struggle that went on between Duncan Sandys and Lord Cherwell as British Intelligence sought to comprehend the threat of the V-2 rocket in the last days of the war. Similarly it reflects the struggle that involved the Germans on their side of the Channel as the Wehrmacht and the Luftwaffe contended for the privilege of launching the rocket. All the demons in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the knowers and spies, are doubled—Germans and British, Americans and Russians. And what they all seek to know is *the* Demon, the secret of the rocket that will enable whoever finds it to rule the world, control its destiny, impose the peace. Thus the second half of the novel ironically follows the well-known race toward Peenemunde and the capture of its mysteries, the capture of Wernher von Braun. Yet all this plotting, both

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historical and narrative, this expense of intelligence, divulges only a brutal joke. The true mystery is not there: it is under Soldiers' Field in Chicago. Late in the novel, as Slothrop sits listlessly in Berlin, a scrap of newspaper informs him: MB DRO ROSHI.

In escaping Pointsman's surveillance in southern France, Slothrop becomes the equivalent of a randomly bouncing molecule slowly and inexorably wearing down. He escapes only Pointsman's plot, not the box of history or the box of his nature. Nor do any of the lovers, rogues, artists and swindlers whose fortunes either coincide or collide with his. Those few who esteem tenderness in the novel, notably Leni Pökler, a young German Marxist, and Roger Mexico, are inevitably deprived, betrayed by their lovers, betrayed by their idealism. Slothrop's search for the rocket leads him into the bowels of the earth, the Mittelwerke at Peenemunde, and into the darkness of the body itself where he circles, a guideless Dante, all the terraces of sexual depravity. Episode by episode, borrowing from De Sade, Havelock Ellis, and undoubtedly Burroughs, Pynchon catalogues the various positions and possibilities. This is the furiously coupling and uncoupling world that Pointsman strives to master demonically, whose exchanges he attempts to systematize. It eludes him. When first met in the narrative, he is trying to seize a stray dog for his laboratory and comically fails, getting his foot caught instead in a loose toilet bowl. Near the end of the novel he castrates the wrong man and is thoroughly disgraced. But his disgrace is not necessarily a good sign in *Gravity's Rainbow*, an indication that tyranny is as finite as tyrants. It proposes rather the hopelessness of history and the ignorance of knowledge.

The contraposed emergence of Weissmann/Blicero in *Gravity's Rainbow* inscribes the novel's other narrative, its other discourse. For where Slothrop's plot-line is fouled with numerous plots, comically entangled with questions, false identities, doppelgangers, lost lovers, vindictive enemies, strewn with surreal episodes, Blicero moves steadily and surely toward his appointed goal. He is the Bad Priest, the heresiarch whose doctrine is Gnostic transcendence, Manichean purification, whose science exists only for the uses of magic, whose disciples understand from the start that what he pursues in his cruelty is the clarity of the absolute. Unlike Pointsman who serves the Demon, Blicero is the master of whiteness. His African pupil and former lover, Enzian, discovers in Europe the meaning of that whiteness: "love, among these men, once past the simple feel and orgasming of it, had to do with masculine technologies, with contracts, with winning and losing. Demanded, in his own case, that he enter the service of the rocket. . . . Beyond simple steel erection, the Rocket was an entire system *won*, away from the feminine darkness, held against the entropies of lovable but scatterbrained Mother Nature: that was the first thing he was obliged by Weissmann to learn, his first step toward citizenship

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in the Zone." To Blicero also belong Katje Borgesius and Gottfried, blonde and blond, a matched pair of selfless 0's whom Blicero instructs in the chastisement of the flesh, the negation of its will. It is the ecstatically sodomized Gottfried, a bleached and neutered boy sheathed in Impolex, a plastic skin, whom Blicero sends up in the 00000 rocket as his cerebral seed. That orgasm strains against the pull of the physical world, the pull of history, the pull of human desire, strains to reach the whiteness beyond space and time, Poe's whiteness, Melville's whiteness, the "colorless all-color" from which, Ishmael confides in *Moby Dick*, we all shrink. But Brennschluss inevitably comes too soon for the 00000, it burns out like the novel itself striving at this far reach, falls back toward Los Angeles into our time even as the novel itself spirals back into literature, into self-reflexive fiction, its own specific gravity.

Where are we, then, at the conclusion of *Gravity's Rainbow*? Looking at the moon. "Is the cycle over now," Blicero speculates, "and a new one ready to begin? Will our new Deathkingdom be the Moon?" Govinda Lal's fugitive manuscript in *Mr. Sammler's Planet* begins with much the same question: "How long will this earth remain the only home of Man?" In Bellow's novel, however, we are on familiar ground since both Dr. Lal and Mr. Sammler are ironic humanists whose moon-talk is comfortably situated in the civility of philosophical discourse, but in Pynchon's fiction the ground is far from defined, far from safe. For one thing, this admirable Ahab wears the uniform of a Schutzhäftlingsführer. *Gravity's Rainbow* begins with an epigraph citing Wernher von Braun's belief in a spiritual existence after death, and of course von Braun was one of the principal engineers who designed the V-2. Like the fictive Blicero who stands apart from the concerns of the preterite, the muddle of politics, von Braun has always insisted that his work on the rocket was dedicated to a higher vision. Unlike Hitler and Goebbels who saw in it the instrument of revenge, Wagnerian tympani, and unlike Gerhard Degenkolb, Walter Dornberger and Albert Speer who were fascinated by the technological aspects of the rocket, von Braun's eyes were presumably lifted upward, beyond good and evil, toward the purity of space. Pynchon appropriates that version of von Braun and transforms it, turning von Braun's convenient piety into the knowledge of the Manichean who knows, above all, that liberation is attained only against nature, against the pull of gravity. The thrust of von Braun's rocket is thus the same act as the thrust of Blicero's cock up Gottfried's ass, a denial of the woman's belly, earth's womb.

Through the mock-historicity of *V.* and *Lot 49*, as we have seen, Pynchon himself elusively plays Stencil's game of "approach and avoid," beguiling his readers with mazes of information that lead nowhere. In their dark, Stencil, Oedipa and Slothrop feel their way along the walls of the womb-world that

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confines them, looking for an opening, looking (to use an apt phrase) for the light at the end of the tunnel. No such light is ever shed. Yet Pynchon's Manichean view of their dilemma is itself constrained, not wholly realized or believed. There are two rockets fired at the end of *Gravity's Rainbow*, the 00000 and the 00001, the first containing Gottfried and the second Enzian, "a good Rocket to take us to the stars, an evil Rocket for the World's suicide, the two perpetually in struggle." Both rockets are nonetheless on death trips, both seek the only bright and splendid way out, the way of the Elect, leaving Slothrop alive beneath them, earthbound and mediocre. The true struggle in *Gravity's Rainbow* is thus between Pointsman and Blicero, Demon and Demon, between modes of death. And here Pynchon's fiction reenters the sphere of history. For these two eminent figures are allegorical representatives not of Light and Dark, Good and Evil, Spirit and Matter, but of the Bourgeois and the Heroic.

In his "hard, ruthless, comic" approach to the history of the Second World War, Pynchon refuses one by one the liberal pieties and moral postures that typically inform such histories. He writes instead a comic novel whose locus is V-bombed London, the concentration camp, destroyed Berlin, throwing in at the end, off-stage, the dull bang at Hiroshima. Yet out of all the burlesque and parody, the caricature and comic routines, he strives to retrieve, or at least reinvent, the value of evil. For what threatens Slothrop's humanity is not the violence of war, but the blankness of peace. He is most alive when the London air is taut with the screaming imminence of his death. Life is lived best amid those tight chances, lived most intensely when there is no complacent middle securing it, only sharp perilous extremes. The ethic Pynchon finally renders in *Gravity's Rainbow* is the ethic of the desperado, not the ethic of the survivor inclosing himself in cool ironies. So the novel is extravagant in style, conception, technique, an extravagance that often overspills into self-indulgence, but which nevertheless constitutes the core of the book. It is through this extravagance that Pynchon insists on his otherness, his anarchic criminality. The meaningless world described in *V.* and *Lot 49* frames this fiction. It is the outlying horrific space that surrounds the Gotterdammerung of 1945. What menaces Stencil and Oedipa in their constant search for the plot is the nausea of the sufficient sameness of everyday life, the common plotless course of bourgeois existence that wears down without significance to an inconspicuous death in a Home for the Aged. Blicero struggles to explode this "cooperative structure of lies," this rationalized world where everything and everyone is named and known.

> The Oedipal situation in the Zone these days is terrible. There is no dignity. The mothers have been masculinized to old worn moneybags of

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> no sexual interest to anyone, and yet here are their sons, still trapped inside inertias of lust that are 40 years out of date. The fathers have no power today and never did, but because 40 years ago we could not kill them, we are condemned now to the same passivity, the same masochist fantasies *they* cherished in secret, and worse, we are condemned in our weakness to impersonate men of power our own infant children must hate . . . So generation after generation of men in love with pain and passivity serve out their time in the Zone, silent, redolent of faded sperm, terrified of dying, desperately addicted to the comforts others sell them, however useless, ugly or shallow, willing to have life defined for them by men whose only talent is for death.

Thus Pynchon restores Ahab to us, Captain Blicero of the SS, the evil father whose malice is our only hope of heroism, whose metaphysical ass-fucking promises us a glamorous death, death with our boots on. But seemingly to no avail. "The petit-bourgeois is a man unable to imagine the Other," Roland Barthes writes in *Mythologies*. "If he comes face to face with him, he blinds himself, ignores and denies him, or else transforms him into himself. In the petit-bourgeois universe, all the experiences of confrontation are reverberating, any otherness is reduced to sameness." This has been Pynchon's fate, the smarmy embrace of toleration. He shares the National Book Award this year with Isaac Bashevis Singer.

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BOOKS

ESSAYS AND FORAYS

THE AGE OF THE AVANT-GARDE: AN ART CHRONICLE OF 1956-1972. By Hilton Kramer, Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $15.00.

OTHER CRITERIA: CONFRONTATIONS WITH TWENTIETH CENTURY ART. By Leo Steinberg. Oxford University Press. $17.50.

DISCOVERING THE PRESENT: THREE DECADES IN ART, CULTURE AND POLITICS. By Harold Rosenberg. The University of Chicago Press. $10.00.

THE CRITICAL POINT: ON LITERATURE AND CULTURE. By Irving Howe. Horizon Press. $7.95.

DISCRIMINATIONS: ESSAYS AND AFTERTHOUGHTS, 1938-1973. By Dwight Macdonald. Grossman Publishers. $15.00.

An Englishman, confronted with this batch of New York criticism, finds it natural to reflect ruefully on the contrast between the American metropolis and his own. It is not merely a matter of there being more talent in New York, for in that we may say there is an element of luck; the inferiority of London is also an economic inferiority, and it is likely to grow more marked as both capitals experience, each in its own measure and in proportion to its own wealth, the worst of the inflationary slump that lies ahead. It is a good while since Dwight Macdonald compared the two cities and uttered his famous eulogy of London; I do not think he would want to say it over again. At any rate it is inconceivable that he could claim for the London of the 70s an ability to match the achievement represented by this random collection of books.

It is New York and not London that has kept open the channels of serious conversation about politics and the arts. The only monthlies published in London that have any claim to be thought of as formative of opinion at a serious level—*Encounter* apart, as it must always be—are, I suppose, *The London Magazine* and *The New Review*. The first of these is a pleasant journal of tiny circulation and very little influence. The second began life earlier this year with a large subsidy—large, anyway, by English standards—from the Arts Council. It has not got away to a good start, contriving to be at once cliquish and "mid-cult." The circulation of the good weeklies is falling

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rapidly, and they contribute less and less to the subsistence of their contributors. There is no quarterly, indeed no journal in which a writer can develop an argument at any length; the perpetual requirement of brevity is a great curse to English critics, especially when the B.B.C. has so reduced the output of serious talk on what used to be the Third Programme. By comparison the American scene is very rich, and not only because a critic can write at some length and be paid enough to live on while doing so, but also because he is likely to be welcome in the academy, as all five writers here discussed appear to be.

There is still, in England, a deep hostility to all who allow the academy to taint them, a feeling that professors are somehow sterile compared with freelance writers, and anyway ought to keep out of journalism, where they are thought of as stealing crusts from the creative but needy. The prejudices of academics are no more honorable or sensible; one of them is the view that critical ability cannot be measured in units smaller than whole books, so that a tediously converted Ph.D. thesis is worthy of more serious attention than a group of mature essays. I was sorry to see that Professor Howe felt it necessary to defend himself against this idiotic opinion in the preface to his new book; have Americans been infected? I believe he is quite right to argue that "the essay, a form both flexible and economical, remains the 'natural' mode for literary criticism," and as I write these words I remember that Mr. Podhoretz found it necessary to make the same kind of statement in his first book *Doings and Undoings*; so it must need saying, even in the relatively happier climate of the U.S.

Nobody, to continue the complaint—nobody in England now does art criticism at the level of Kramer and Steinberg; not, I think because the critics do not exist—David Sylvester in his *New Statesman* days had a peculiar brilliance which Steinberg occasionally calls to mind—but because they lack inducements, such as the right paper and the right pay. (Perhaps an important school of painting is another advantage, but it would be too depressing to go into that.) Kramer's book is simply a collection of his reviews over sixteen years. The shows he talks about have long been dispersed, and many of the books are hidden on their shelves, so what holds the collection together? Kramer says it is a concern for the avant-garde and its aftermath; there is an introductory essay explaining what the aftermath is, and proposing a "revisionist" view of the avant-garde era. But what really holds it together is not this historical hypothesis, but the fresh and constantly renewed play of critical intelligence on each new topic. The opening essay, generalizing, is perhaps the least impressive, though it does make the useful point that the avant-garde was parasitic on the bourgeois liberalism it so despised, and that one of the factors hastening its demise was the loss of a shockable public. The avant-

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garde now has a respectable tradition, whereas the bad-faith traditions of their traditional enemies have been dissipated. It is now a "museum culture." Kramer reinforces this transformed status by arguing, for example, that Turner is the true father of modern painting; he is, in fact, a museum man himself, with a strong tendency to argue from the painting or the exhibition before him to the general history of painting. He is always instructing us, and perhaps the painters too. The recent London exhibition of Symbolist art induces him to suggest that Puvis de Chavannes must be got out of the necropolis into the museum, there to be joined by Redon, and possibly by Simeon Solomon. The history of modern painting thus becomes something Yeats would have understood seventy years ago.

One of Kramer's basic skills is to provide, in brief compass, a clear idea of an entire oeuvre, as for instance of Feininger or Beckmann. He is especially good on what Samuel Johnson would have called "idea-d" artists, like Kandinsky; and he is capable of severity in such discussions, as when he reproves Mohol-Nagy: "The world is changed, alas, only by political action, and philosophers of design who refuse to face this harsh truth consign themselves to a permanent state of self-deception." I found him interesting on those early Soviet artists John Berger has made known in England; the years when an alliance between radical politics and avant-garde art seemed possible he characterizes sadly as "a tender historical moment," which he remembers again when condemning those displays of reconstructed works by, say, Tatlin, as the "repellent" operations of "contemporary museology."

The typical strategy of a Kramer piece is a sort of rhetorical peripeteia. If Henry Moore looks modernist he will turn out to be a representative of the English pastoral tradition. If Bourdelle looks like a belated Romantic he nevertheless belongs, "undeniably, to modern sculpture." Kramer is always straightening out bent judgments and bent history: "we are only at the beginning of an era in which the 'little masters' of the School of Paris are going to be looked at as individuals rather than as legendary . . . protagonists in the heroic saga of modern art." He finds in Clement Greenberg "a fear of the personal element in art," a devotion to his own version of "the impersonal process of history," yet in a sense he might be accused of the same tendency. Well aware of the danger of premature history (see his strictures on Sam Hunter's study of Pollock), he is nevertheless quite quick to tell us we must see Motherwell against the background of "a rich and complex history"; similar issues come up in the essay on Hofmann. He is also aware of the primary need for the personal response and the valuation that precedes historical judgment; this is well illustrated in his writing on Frank Stella. But he has nevertheless a strong predilection for history, which induces in him a mildly apocalyptic sadness; we have moved out of a period in which avant-garde art

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spoke to the human condition, and into an age of decoration. In Neo-Dada we see a culture turning on itself, with destructive intent. We are living in the Last Days, says Mr. Kramer, surveying a century and a half of painting with the same kind of eschatological gloom that Auerbach felt as he scanned two millenia and more of literature. I thought this book both memorable and instructive.

Mr. Steinberg's title means that we need not be stuck with "seasonal" criteria, since by thinking we can come up with new ones. His thinking is done, for the most part, in long meditative "confrontations," notably with Jasper Johns and Picasso. These essays—the Picasso material so generous as to be almost a book in itself, and embedded, by the equal generosity of the publisher, in a beautifully designed book—seem to me exceptionally fine. The descriptions of painting are unflaggingly accurate and imaginative, and this fidelity to the experience of the painting is by no means impaired by Steinberg's prose style, which is always clear and acute, without mandarin or cliquish affectation. Indeed it might be said in passing that all these writers use their own version of an excellent educated common style—Macdonald with the most bite and verve, Steinberg perhaps with the greatest reflective elegance. It is, after all, an index of civility to have such a common style, and it is curious that many Americans suppose they must look for it across the ocean rather than at home.

The Picasso piece is a richly illustrated argument centered on *Les Demoiselles D'Avignon*—a personal encounter with one of the crucial moments of modern art history which is truly equal to its occasion. The Johns is also fine, and so is the authoritative study of Rodin. A man less prodigal of talent and research would have got more than a single book out of this. Since it is impossible to do more than recommend these essays without specifying their merits, let me add that Steinberg is not simply an accurate observer; he possesses a benign skepticism, and often takes a shrewd look at our *idées reçues*. Is action painting "living on the canvas"? No, it's untrue unless trivially is true of all painting. See also his wise remarks on illusionism, and the unsoundness of the distinction between an old art that concealed the medium and a new that calls attention to it (in the essay called "Other Criteria"). Anyone with views on any modern art should read this book.

Mr. Rosenberg's volume ranges characteristically over art and politics; it includes many fugitive pieces tracked down by Mr. Michael Denneny and rightly revived and collected. The book naturally lacks something of the impact of those the author put together himself, but it is full of wise, aggressive comment on painting, poetry, psychoanalysis and culture; on Jewish art and boring art; and on intellectuals, a class of person the English tend not to have or to encourage. There are *obiter dicta* much too good to be lost:

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"Duchamps cut the tie between art and the handicrafts, thus immersing art in endless talk" is one. Among the more substantial pieces is a fine lecture called "The Politics of Illusion," an ingenious application of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* to recent revolutionary situations. There is also an interesting group of notes and aphorisms simply called Themes, which gives us a clue to Rosenberg's ways of preparing his more public works. One is called "Scale": "It is desirable at times for ideas to possess a certain roughness, like drawings on heavy-grain paper. Thoughts having this quality are most likely to match the texture of actual experiences. Under the influence of methodology and scholarship, our concepts tend more and more to become either microscopic or cosmic. Objective techniques are unable to guarantee that concepts will keep relations of size appropriate to things and events. To get these right, the thinker must be aware of his own self and use it as a measure. But if this awareness is an honest one, it is bound to dispel evenness and excessive finesse." This seems true generally, but also of Rosenberg's mind in particular.

Professor Howe's book consists of substantial essays on cultural and literary topics; the brow is furrowed but the prose is strong, and the author always knows, and will lucidly explain, where he stands and, if it is relevant, where he stood. He is disturbed by the "frenetic apocalyptism of the time," its infatuation with violence of word and deed, its reduction of "the great tradition of cultural modernism" to mere "chic sensation." He has a good eye for the deluded, and for the dangers they present, whether they are students or proponents of women's liberation; and he always tries to distinguish the creditable "genuine stirrings of moral outrage" from dangerous imitations.

Howe writes as a socialist aware of the peculiar confusions and disappointments experienced by all who hold to some such position in a "post-capitalist" era; and though under the handicap of almost never disagreeing with him (I am much less well informed but my position is quite close to his), I was continuously instructed by his insights into the nature of our unease. About higher education, for instance: we weren't wrong to want a great deal more of it, but we were wrong not to have found out what we thought it was for. Howe represents himself as the troubled modern descendant of the decent socialist of the past, knowing it is all much harder than used to be thought, denied that "simple faith." In this position he finds it necessary to adopt an almost Arnoldian posture; and he acknowledges an obligation as an intellectual never to compromise when the truth is at issue, even if that means taking a stand against a newer socialism.

One never feels that Howe uses different voices for politics and literature. Writing on the City in Literature, he makes some delicate distinctions ("almost every *idea* about the city tempts us to forget what the young Dickens

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never forgot: the city is a place of virtuosity, where men can perform with freedom and abandonment") but, ranging over several literatures, he also relates our mistakes and myths about the city to a kind of cultural remorse, and indicates the need for political action. I think he overrates Solzhenitsyn, whom he uses as a stick to beat Lukacs; he can be brisk in polemic, as against George Steiner and Kate Millett, but at his best, say in the essay on Pound's last literary prize, he has a very humane sense of conflicting claims and values; this also controls his essays on Sylvia Plath and suicide, and in the end gives the collection its quite undeniable distinction.

Many of the articles in Dwight Macdonald's book are already and justly famous, and it hardly falls to me to explain, in this journal, how valuable and enviable an asset he is to his society. He declares that the business of the critic is to discriminate, that is, in Webster's definition (2nd. edition, naturally) to distinguish accurately, for example between fancy and fact. This account of his purposes hardly allows for the frequent gratuitous ebullition of high spirits that characterizes his record of fact and his assault on fancy, but it does explain his willingness to find things out. As an enquirer he is perpetually rewarded with glimpses of truth and folly.

This book opens with the long *Esquire* essay proposing amendments to the Constitution, engagingly festooned with footnotes, an afterword and an appendix. The rest of it has original things to say about practically every event of national importance in the writer's lifetime, or at any rate from the Thirties on, with Hiss and Columbia, the Pentagon March, the Johnson Arts Festival, the Chicago Conspiracy trial strongly featured, and the Warren Report obligingly "rescued from its authors." Among the individuals who get the rough side of Macdonald's tongue are Marshall McLuhan, Tom Wolfe and Norman Cousins at whichever desk, *Saturday Review* or *World*: "I've always specialized in negative criticism."

Discriminations is a necessary book because it fills in the lacunae in earlier collections made by a powerful and prolific commentator. It is also great fun; as with Gibbon, you can have a good time merely by reading the footnotes. Nor should these remarks suggest any lack of tonal variety, for Macdonald is versatile as well as instantly identifiable. His onslaughts against America are, I think, a sign of health. One piece here reprinted is the famous "America! America!," originally written for *Encounter* and rejected by the journal's backers because, using as a standard an admittedly somewhat romanticized view of England in 1956-7, he attacked his own country as lacking in conviviality and manners, and as an unresisting prey to repellent cults. This article is the only piece of writing known to have been rejected by *Encounter* at the insistence of the Congress for Cultural Freedom; it was so identified when the whole pathetic truth came to light in 1967. Macdonald now adds an Afterword which will come in handy when somebody sets about

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writing an account of the affair. Macdonald would be the perfect author. But at present this reminder of what I myself would rather forget takes me back to my opening lament. In eight years the English have done nothing about providing authors with an alternative to *Encounter*, which is still financed by (perfectly clean, of course) American money. It is hard to believe, and if we had a Macdonald among us it would probably not be so.

Frank Kermode

INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE

A CHILD'S HISTORY OF AMERICA: SOME RIBS AND RIFFS FOR THE SIXTIES. By Charles Newman. The Swallow Press. $8.95.

All books of any worth have some multiplicity about them, asking us to respond to them, perhaps, as both invention and sermon, or polemic and game, or grammar and prayer, both at the same time. But Charles Newman's *Child's History of America* asks for a more multiple and complicated response than any recent book I know. For one thing, it is an extraordinarily lovely book, not ostentatiously, like a coffee-table book, but modestly and functionally, in ways that demand a response. I do not know how a small press like Swallow can afford to make some of the most attractive books now published, but they do, integrating lay-out, paper, type, the very size of the book with its content in a way so artful as to put the large New York publishers to shame. For another thing, the book is, as Newman acknowledges in his preface, "without genre," which means, for me, that I respond to it with nothing of the consistency that I would give to a novel, or a volume of memoirs. It is, variously, a confession and a kind of baroque invention superimposed upon the basic data of experience, a tale by Quixote and a tale by Sancho, an outline history of the main currents of Western thought, and an underground history of dangerous ideas, a narration so joyous and buoyant and extravagant that its roots can only be located in Mark Twain and the

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American tall tale, and a narrative so dark and depressing that its view of our particular abyss would have shaken that old cynic Twain.

The book is a set of variations on Newman's travels, mainly in 1968, in England, France, East Europe, and the Soviet Union. One looks, ordinarily, for a consistent narrator in books structured on international travel, against whose consistency the flux of nationalities, personal encounters, the usual missed trains and lost passports of such books is naturally set. Newman, however, is a picaro, elusive and Protean, at moments naive, at other moments so penetrating and sophisticated that he dominates his landscape. At moments he is the victim, an American gull among the Europeans, a figure from early James, at other moments the escapee, a Houdini out of Evanston. Coupled with this sense of the personal multiplicity of Newman as actor in the events recorded is a shifting sense of Newman the writer, recording, with varying distance, with some pride, with some remorse, with some surprise, the adventures of that self of several years before. No passage better expresses the ironic intricacy I am trying to describe than one of the author's marginal comments on himself, after an especially bizarre episode.

> As I reread this, I note a certain unsteadiness of tone, which if this were fiction, I would correct. It is unclear, for example, whether the "narrator" wants to be taken as larky or grim, searching or glib, confused or wrong-headed, a relatively decent young man, or an arrogant prick. I do know this is how I acted then, but cannot to this day know whether to attribute my redundant cruelty to a temporary paranoia, a deficiency of character or experience. And at that, I must leave it.

It is the marginalia from which I quote, an aspect of the design of the book that is both visually startling and functionally impressive. Much of the time the running account, often as scenically concrete as very good realistic fiction, is set, in unjustified lines, against a marginal commentary that represents a plausibly divided self, the Apollonian commenting on the Dionysian, the critic on the novelist, the novelist on the autobiographer, the cause on the effect, the idea on the action, with quotations from Mercia Eliade and Sartre, Chairman Mao and Marx, Baudelaire and Stendhal, Brautigan and Harry Crews, along with a large amount of dreck, from newspapers, cookbooks, and public lavatory walls.

One of the consequences both of Newman's ironic indeterminacy and of his marginal juxtapositions is that the ideas within the book—and the book bristles with insights, aphorisms, remembered quotes from other people's books, an intellectual life of remarkable grace and intensity—all exist within a dramatic context. Early in the book Newman remarks, to a Yugoslav who asks what the difference is between American prose and poetry, that the poets all

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know each other and the novelists don't. One judges the sentence not so much as truth (it is a more-than-half-truth, of considerable implications), as drama, deciding whether it was an appropriate thing to have said to *that* Yugoslav on *that* occasion. So it is with the persistent themes that work their way through a book that seems aleatory and improvised but is thematically quite deliberate, the nature of American-ness, the nature of education both American and European, the stability and plasticity of words, the character of political movements. "I wonder sometimes," muses Newman, "if I wouldn't give up some of my personal freedom simply to be governed by men I could respect as human beings." And one understands the sentence to be at once idea and dramatic response, in this case to Hungary and Czechoslovakia in 1968.

What finally seems to me most remarkable, however, about this remarkable book is its relation not so much to the world of intellect and politics, which it constantly refracts, but to plain and classic autobiographical truth. The confessional tradition, through Augustine and Rousseau, Thoreau and Henry Adams, is full of, indeed characterized by, dizzying alternations of bravado and humiliation, self-absorption and self-rejection, solipsism and the passing panorama of the not-self, as Fiedler once put his view of the polarities chutzpah and pudeur. To say that Newman's book finds its own voice, makes its own relations between those poles, in a tradition as old as Augustine, is, I think, saying very much indeed. I see Newman as a marginal participant in public events, but I do not see him as a copy of Mailer. I see him flashing back to his origins, but I do not see him as a copy, say, of Edmund Wilson or Nabokov or a hundred others who have done the same. It is a personal history with both a structure and a voice all its own. I find myself quoting again from Newman's marginal notes on himself. "Inadvertently," he writes, after an episode no more preposterous than a dozen others and perfectly credible as it is being told, "long about page 247, this became fiction. It won't happen again." I find that sentence an encapsulation of a mixture of inventive energy and self-irony, chutzpah and pudeur, so haunting that I cannot imagine anybody else, in the whole history of confessional literature, having written it.

Philip Stevick

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THE WHOLE EARTH

PASSAGES ABOUT EARTH: AN EXPLORATION OF THE NEW PLANETARY CULTURE. By William Irwin Thompson. Harper & Row. $6.95.

This most recent book by William Irwin Thompson is evidence that neither a trained intellect, an expensive education, nor the study of history can protect you from a will to believe. It is also evidence of the gratifications that accompany an adaption of "*Credo quia absurdum est*" as one's working slogan. His first book, *The Imagination of an Insurrection* (1967), was evidence of something else. Its announced theme was "the role of imagination in history"; its subject-matter, the relation of Irish literature to the insurrection of Easter, 1916; its methods, rational; its conclusions, tough; its moral, disenchanted; its conception of history, secular. In spite of quirks and crotchets, it looked like the first work of an academic historian whose future work promised to be more than merely academic.

His second book, *At the Edge of History* (1971), reneged on that promise. It is an account of Thompson's attempt "to gain a perspective on history by getting out of history," alas. It is an account of how he left the academy, exposed himself to the future at the Esalen Institute of Big Sur, and wound up in Montreal, a kind of Rivendell (as in Tolkien), "the perfect retreat in which to look from one end of history to the other." What he saw was, on the one hand, the death of everything as we know it, including bourgeois democracy, the industrial nation-state, print, rationality, the family, "Homo Sexualis," and Homo sapiens; and on the other hand, the birth of a new cosmic consciousness and a new planetary culture.

In his second book Thompson was still at the edge looking around; his new book is a product of his leap into the abyss of faith. Its matter falls into three categories: 1) accounts of the portents and contents of the new planetary civilization; 2) advertisements for the Lindisfarne Association, which Thompson founded in 1973 in Southampton, Long Island, and where students of all ages may enroll in courses "for the transformation of consciousness as the foundation for a person's existence in the new planetary culture"; 3) materials for a future hagiography of William Irwin Thompson.

Thompson does not argue his case for the coming extinction of Homo sapiens and all his products. The portents are everywhere and unmistakeable. He is more concerned with prophesying "the now emerging new age of the

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gods,'' details of which he discovered in visions and in the thought of Teilhard de Chardin, Carl Jung, V.A. Ambartsumyan, Edgar Cayce, C.F. von Weizsäcker, Erick von Däniken, David Spangler, Paolo Soleri, Aurelio Peccei, Marshall McLuhan, Pythagoras, Sri Aurobindo, Gopi Krishna, Paramahansa Yoganda, Doris Lessing, Stanley Kubrick, Ivan Illich, Arthur C. Clarke, C.S. Lewis, H.G. Wells, Immanuel Velikovsky, and Plato. The advance guard of the new planetary culture has already established bases all over the world, in associations and institutes where people pray over plants or speak to elves, or practice the Yogas, Tantra, Hatha, and Kriya, where they seek to unlock the mysteries of ESP, Kirlian photography, etheric energy, psychic healing, psychokinesis, astral projection, Atlantis, and ''the cities hidden in the other dimensions of the Bermuda Triangle.''

''The vast new sphere of posthuman thought'' revealed in these associations, those thinkers, and his own visions turns out to be no more than the pneumatic corpus of Madame Blavatsky unveiled in a setting of California Moderne. (''What Los Angeles is experiencing is the future for all of us,'' says Thompson, who expects to be at home in the future: ''California is my home, even if I must live away from it.'') If you take ''all the variants of this planetary mythology'' that Thompson sees everywhere, and then ''sort out the information from the noise,'' you come up with ''four propositions of a new world view'':

1. There is intelligent life in the universe beyond earth.

2. The meeting we are expecting in front of us in linear time has already occurred, is now occurring, and will continue to occur. The gods do not talk *to* us, they play *through* us *with* our history.

3. There is more to our history than the meager record of six thousand years. Our religious myths are the detritus of the lost history of earth.

4. Our subjective-objective distinctions about reality are incorrect. As in the world view of the Hopi Indians, Matter, Energy, and Consciousness form a continuum.

There a number of things worth noticing about this new world view, outside of the fact that it is not new. For one thing, it depends (psychologically, if not logically) on the thrilling idea that ''some kind of violent apocalypse'' is imminent. But only for the bad guys, the impresarios of things as they are. ''For those who lock all their psychic energy into dying forms and rigidly resist the pulse of life, there is only death and the denial of death in greed. For those who cannot let go, apocalypse comes to deliver them violently.'' Prominent among those who resist the pulse of life are positivists

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("but perhaps Apocalypse will take care of mechanistic positivism"), the "ruling leftist intellectuals in the universities," the "modern technocratic liberal," who is distinguishable from the "paranoid Eastern Liberal," that denizen of the New Babylon, "the New York of Normans Mailer and Podhoretz." In the mystic California of the future there will be no room for "the clever ironies and sophistications of the New York intelligentsia." The ground of Thompson's hatred for New York, I take it, is that relative to California, New York is the Reality Principle, the "dead center of the present."

Miles away in mental space from that wicked and moribund center are "those living places where the culture of man is not cutting violently against the grain of the universe," places like Auroville (India), Findhorn (Ireland), Arcosanti (Arizona), and of course, Lindisfarne (Long Island), points of light in the gathering darkness, vantages from which the saving remnant can watch the unrighteous go up in smoke to become perfume in the nostrils of the unrighteous (to paraphrase St. Thomas Aquinas). The righteous are like heirs watching impatiently while their patriarch writhes in a final convulsion, the answer to their dreams of inheriting the earth. "The primary fantasy of our time is to escape catastrophe by building an ark or founding an apocalyptic colony far removed from the collapse of civilization," says Thompson, and he leaves us no doubt as to who is Noah or where is the ark ("The Lindisfarne Association is designed to be a vehicle of the new planetary Renaissance") or who, after the deluge, will be in charge: "Those who have effected the shift to cosmic consciousness will probably serve as future versions of the Athenian elect who were initiate to the mysteries."

To someone who hasn't been able to bring off that shift, Thompson's cosmic consciousness begins to look like another case of the omnipotence of thought. When thought becomes omnipotent, matter loses its brute intransigence; it becomes merely "a condensation of consciousness," spirit grown cold. Heated up again, consciousness seeps into nature, curdles it, pulls it in, digests it, makes it one's own substance. "Consciousness is a moving form that evolves toward maximum organization and improbability, and it feeds upon the physical systems that move toward maximum molecular disorganization and probability." Cosmic consciousness "feeds" not only on nature, but on culture; it is an antidote to alienation and a substitute for politics: "The way to effect the most profound cultural transformation is not to expend one's energies in attacking institutions or industrial society as a whole, but to surround society with a new field of consciousness." Consciousness is not the superstructure, not the product of what we do, but its cause—"it is not the case that consciousness is created out of behavior; behavior is a construct built up out of consciousness." It is not time-bound, the function of

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an historical locus, but the means of escape from all times and places: "The individual's consciousness in meditation takes him out of history; it gives him a glimpse of the total field beyond his personal location."

Having gobbled up nature, society, and history, cosmic consciousness turns its hungry eyes toward other peoples and sees in them only attributes of itself. "What separates beings in the world is not space but consciousness," or the lack of it, rather. An expanded consciousness is without spaces or dimensions; its center is everywhere and its circumference nowhere. "Cosmically, mankind is a single de Broglie wave, or what Christians would call the Mystical Body of Christ." And the beauty of cosmic consciousness in its collective aspects is that it does not require you to give up anything of yourself: "In the Mystical Body of Christ, at the very end of human spiritual evolution, the *more* one expresses his uniqueness and his absolute freedom, the more truly he relates to the ecstatic whole of the single being that is mankind." The more you are yourself, the more you are everybody, yes, but also the less everybody else is anything at all; and the less, as Thompson's argument twists, you are yourself. The "absolute freedom" turns out to be an absolute servitude. Once free from nature, society, history, space, time and other people, you become a plaything of the gods. "They play *through* us *with* our history," says Thompson:

> Just as we corral beasts to keep them in their place for our use, and as we sit on the fence and watch them ruminate all day long, we wonder how they can stand to eat all the time; so the gods and demons corral us in history, and as they sit on the edge, they wonder how we can stand to *think* all day long. Within our corrals of history they come to stir up our wars and passions, so that we can be fat with the astral emanations that sustain them. Knowing that we are afraid of death, they catch us with its linked opposite, sexuality. Eros is thus the attractive jailkeeper in the prisons of Thanatos.

The body is a coffin and sex is what keeps it there. The resurrected body will be sexless. Already in *At The Edge of History* Thompson was noting with a kind of suppressed glee that "scientists now speak openly about the obsolete nature of the body and childbirth" and that "child-bearing is about to become the ritual art of the affluent classes, as breast-feeding is now." He optimistically predicted that "it is only a question of perhaps a century or less before Homo Sexualis takes his place with Homo Neanderthalensis." The ground for his optimism is that "we are literally sick of and sick with the phallic culture of our industrial technology." In *Passages About Earth* Thompson explains how cosmic consciousness will cure our sickness: "putting semen into the head is what Tantra Yoga is all about." When we

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have universal sex in the head, "psychic culture will replace sexual culture." Through a certain Gopi Krishna, Thompson learned how

> through meditation, the prana of the semen is reversed and begins to flow up through the spinal column into the brain. As the sexual secretions go up the spinal column, an intense and ecstatic consciousness is generated, and the individual feels that he is both male and female at once, for the spinal column becomes a vagina and the brain becomes the womb for the birth of a divine child. The transformed yogi thus becomes an angelic androgyne.

Cosmic consciousness, or sex in the head, therefore, not only incorporates nature, society, history, space, time and other people in general to escape the prison of the self; it also absorbs in specific the sexual Other in its escape from the coffin of the body: "If the individual becomes both a man and a woman, then he is no longer asexual like the timeless amoeba, or tragically mortal like the sexual human; he-she becomes eternal like a divine being." See?

"*Credo quia absurdum est*," says Thompson, but he is not the first to believe in this particular set of absurdities. The self-love that smothers the world in its embrace is Gnostic. So is the self-hatred that projects inner compulsions onto external agents. So is the hatred of the body and its needs, the repression of which turns them into compulsions. So is the hatred of things as they are, of perceptible reality, whether natural or social. So is the hatred of those who control things as they are, whether the source of the power by which they control things is conceptual or political, whether they are technocrats, bureaucrats, liberals, leftists, or New York intellectuals. So is the apocalyptic longing that projects a resentment against things as they are and those who maintain them onto cosmic agents of retribution, agents unerring in their ability to separate the sheep from the goats. To the outsider, however, such gods look like denizens of inner space, inadmissible fears and longings or fears and longings for which one does not want to take responsibility, projected into outer space. The believer longs for atonement with them because they are alienated portions of himself, but he also fears them precisely as he fears what in himself fear caused him to repress. It is the devils you cast out that return to possess you.

The first gnosticism was the ghost dance of ancient civilization. It spawned Christianity, the subsequent relationship of which to Gnosticism was that simultaneously of the parricide and the sibling rival. The return of the repressed is perhaps slow, but it is also inexorable, and most Western millennial sects have been gnostic to one degree or another, from Apollonius

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of Tyana to Manson of California. Beneath the gnostic content, however, the millennial heresies of Western Christians have structural similarities to crisis cults—nativistic movements, cargo cults, ghost-dances—from all over the world. Generalizing from his study of medieval apocalyptics, Norman Cohen defines as millennarian "any religious movement inspired by the phantasy of salvation which is to be

> (a) collective, in the sense that it is to be enjoyed by the faithful as a group;
>
> (b) terrestrial, in the sense that it is to be realized on this earth and not in some otherworldly heaven;
>
> (c) imminent, in the sense that it is to come both soon and suddenly;
>
> (d) total, in the sense that it is utterly to transform life on earth, so that the new dispensation will be no mere improvement on the present but perfection itself;
>
> (e) accomplished by agencies which are consciously regarded as supernatural.*

The neo-gnostic millennium of planetary consciousness awaited by the faithful of Lindisfarne is an old and recurrent pipe-dream; it is a type of the consoling delusion that escapes through cracks in the character armor of a body politic shattered by ecological disaster, internal stress, or collision with a more powerful culture. There are active crisis cults in every part of the third world right now, as there have been from the time of Henry the Navigator. The religions of the oppressed tend to be millennial, but the oppression may amount to no more than that the world refuses to take on the shape of one's head, as in the case of Thompson. In the West, millennial eruptions came especially thick and fast during the collapse of ancient civilization, during the collapse of the medieval world, and during the last eighty years or so, while humanism has been tottering. The turn-of-the-century pan-Slavic and pan-Teutonic movements, among other things, were ghost dances, as was Hitler's fascism, to mention only three that had world-wide consequences.

The breeding-ground of crisis cults in the United States is California. In Nathaniel West's *The Day of the Locust*, Tod Hackett tries to forget Faye Greener by working on his painting, "The Burning of Los Angeles":

* Norman Cohen, "Medieval Millenarism: Its Bearing on the Comparative Study of Millenarian Movements," in *Millenial Dreams in Action*, ed. Sylvia L. Thrupp (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), p. 31.

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> He spent his nights at the different Hollywood churches, drawing the worshippers. He visited the "Church of Christ, Physical" where holiness was attained through the constant use of chestweights and spring grips; the "Church Invisible" where fortunes were told and the dead made to find lost objects; the "Tabernacle of the Third Coming" where a woman in male clothing preached the "Crusade Against Salt"; and the "Temple Moderne" under whose glass and chromium roof "Brain-Breathing, the Secret of the Aztecs" was taught.
>
> . . . One Friday night in the "Tabernacle of the Third Coming," a man near Tod stood up to speak. Although his name most likely was Thompson or Johnson and his home town Sioux City, he had the same countersunk eyes, like the heads of burnished spikes, that a monk by Magnaseo might have. He was probably just in from one of the colonies in the desert near Soboda Hot Springs where he had been conning over his soul on a diet of raw fruit and nuts. He was very angry. The message he had brought to the city was one that an illiterate anchorite might have given decadent Rome. It was a crazy jumble of dietary rules, economics and Biblical threats. He claimed to have seen the Tiger of Wrath stalking the walls of the citadel and the Jackel of Lust skulking in the shrubbery, and he connected these omens with "thirty dollars every Thursday" and meat eating.

A man called Johnson or Thompson. . . . As William Irwin Thompson says, "In Los Angeles it is much harder to distinguish between personal fantasy and social reality." The brain-breathing Thompson teaches at Lindisfarne is not Aztec, but Indian. The congregation at Thompson's Temple Moderne gather to celebrate "the wedding of the mystique of German science and the mysticism of Indian Yoga." But what Thompson calls science is no more scientific than Scientology or the Church of Christ, Scientist. It is the sign of an attempt to co-opt and counter the magic of the unrighteous. Science is to cosmic consciousness what airplanes are to cargo cults. The Oriental mysticism is there to get religion in by the back door. Thompson has staked everything on his bet that "we have reached the limit of Western Christian civilization" by which he means the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. While sharing with us the amazing coincidences and portentous symmetries that mark the stations of his calling, Thompson lets slip that he is "an apostate Catholic," but, as it turns out, one more Catholic than apostate. What beyond doubt he really hankers for is "the concentric, hierarchical, nonmechanistic values of the Catholic world view." The repressed returns slowly and through crooked corridors, but inexorably. All crisis cults are at once newfangled and atavistic.

And all of them are symptoms of what they claim to cure. In societies, as in people, the disease is nothing else but the sum of its symptoms. These appear successively, each new one a product and complication of the ones that

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appeared before it as well as a cause of the novel malignancies to come. The proliferation of quackeries, the flight from secular naturalism into supernaturalism, the abdication of the ego to the omnipotence of thought, is not, of course, the only symptom of what is wrong with us, and probably not the main one either. There are symptoms enough of a strictly secular kind to put anyone in an apocalyptic mood or to make the hardest of heads look for a world softened by fantasy to rest itself upon. Some of the smartest people in the West during this century have done so. T.S. Eliot looked around and saw writers everywhere hotfoot after strange gods, but if you ask me, his god is as strange as any of them, no matter how orthodox. When personal distress and social stress begin to close in on you from either side, the urge to leap out from between into the boundless dimensions of cosmic consciousness becomes just about irresistible. Nevertheless, you do not cure a disease by succumbing to it, by becoming one of its symptoms.

But that is exactly what William Irwin Thompson, a smart man, has done, and in an exemplary way—which is why, as it seems to me, he is worth all these words. It takes considerable stress or distress to make a smart man transform his intelligence from an instrument for testing and exploring what is not itself into a device for rationalizing an absurdity, even when the absurdity has the knock-down logic of a consoling delusion. And such symptoms of unbearable distress have become epidemic. Flight from the stresses of existence in the here and now has become a rout. Everyone's gone to the moon. It may be, as Thompson laments, that "Mass American culture is, of course, not ready for this etheric sexuality," for, that is, "the Tantric technique of nonorgasmic genital coupling"; but from the depths of my own apocalyptic mood, mass American culture looks ready for just about anything else. It is ready for everything but the future it is helping to bring about, a future less likely to be a suburb of Los Angeles than a planetary Bangladesh, a disaster area whose circumference is nowhere, its center everywhere—and that includes the inner (and empty) space of cosmic consciousness.

George Stade

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THE REVOLUTION THAT NEVER WAS

MICHAEL BAKUNIN: SELECTED WRITINGS. Edited and introduced by Arthur Lehning. Evergreen Edition, Grove Press. $4.95.

Of the great revolutionaries, Michael Bakunin was surely the least successful. The actual revolutions in which he took part—in Dresden in 1849, in Lyons in 1870, or the last pathetic fiasco at Bologna in 1874—all were either defeated or did not even start. In the struggle with Marx within the First International, Marx was the victor. The secret societies Bakunin founded often existed only in his own head, and even the anarchist groups in Spain, Italy and Russia which were the most concrete achievements of his disciples eventually lost out to their Marxist rivals.

Yet the myth of Bakunin remains a powerful one. Is it because of what he was or because of what he wrote? It is only recently that it has been at all easy to read what he wrote, especially in English translation, and this has perhaps led us to overestimate Bakunin's personality and to underestimate his ideas. However Bakunin's writings are now becoming more available, thanks largely to the dedicated scholarship of Mr. Arthur Lehning, the editor of the present volume of extracts, who is preparing a massive complete edition of Bakunin's works under the auspices of the admirable Institute for Social History in Amsterdam. Moreover, in 1972 Sam Dolgoff published a selection of Bakunin's writings in English translation, *Bakunin on Anarchy*, with a preface by Paul Avrich. Lehning's volume overlaps with this to some extent, but it prints longer extracts from the most important texts, though it leaves out the famous *Appeal to the Slavs* of 1848, and the notorious *Confession of the Tsar* of 1851, from both of which Sam Dolgoff prints short passages. Students of nineteenth-century revolutionary thought will be glad of both books.

Bakunin was not a natural writer: his talents were those of a militant organizer and inspirer of revolutionary movements, with a rare gift of transmitting his revolutionary enthusiasm to others. Yet his writings have a freshness and vigor which convey something of his personality, his violence, his charm, his dedication to the revolutionary cause. "History," he wrote, "is made not by abstract individuals but by acting, living and passing individuals." He was just such an individual, and he made no attempt to produce, as Marx was doing, a systematic scientific theory of society. Indeed, he was sceptical about scientific systems, about the doctrinaire pretensions of "popes and priests . . . even if they call themselves Social Democrats." While

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social science should point to "the general causes of individual suffering" and "the general conditions necessary to the real emancipation of individuals living in society," life is constantly revolting against science and asserting the rights of individuals against the abstractions in whose name governments everywhere are constantly inflicting sufferings.

Like many intellectuals of his generation—he was born in 1814—Bakunin was overwhelmed by the ideas of Hegel, and these continued throughout his life to affect his own views and the language in which he expressed them. What is perhaps his most famous phrase, "The passion for destruction is a creative passion, too" comes at the end of one of the most Hegelian of all his writings, the early fragment (1842) on *The Reaction in Germany*; and it is in terms of the Hegelian dialectic that it has to be understood. When it is read in the context of the immediately preceding sentence—"Let us therefore trust the eternal Spirit which destroys and annihilates only because it is the unfathomable and eternally creative source of all life"—it acquires a more metaphysical and less revolutionary meaning. This is by no means the advocacy of blind physical destruction which has sometimes been associated with Bakunin, and indeed is not far from the ideas of Herbert Marcuse about "the liberating function of negation."

Did Bakunin change his attitude to violence later in his life? It was long believed by some writers (including the present one) that, in the 1860s, under the influence of the young Russian student revolutionary Sergei Nechaev, Bakunin became an advocate of terrorist tactics as a means of achieving the revolution and that he collaborated with Nechaev in drafting the notorious *Catechism of the Revolutionist* (not to be confused with the text published in this volume under the heading "Revolutionary Catechism" in the *Principles and Organisation of the International Brotherhood*), with its open advocacy of extermination by "poison, the knife and the rope etc." Arthur Lehning has long denied that Bakunin was ever a supporter of terrorist methods; and his views have been given some support by the recent researches of the Israeli scholar Michael Confino in his *Violence dans la Violence* (Paris, 1973) and *Daughter of a Revolutionary* (London, 1974). Confino suggests that there are good grounds for supposing that Nechaev alone was responsible for the *Catechism of the Revolutionist* and that Bakunin went out of his way to disassociate himself from the violent methods it advocated.

Yet Bakunin's attitude to violence remains ambiguous. For all his love of the excitement of the barricades, he remained reluctant to spell out just what revolution might mean in practice. "In order to launch a radical revolution, it is . . . necessary to attack positions and things and to destroy property and the State, but there will be no need to destroy men and condemn ourselves to the inevitable reaction that is unfailingly produced in every society by the

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slaughter of men." Elsewhere he is more realistic: "Inevitably the Russian revolution will be a terrible revolution. Whoever is frightened of horrors and mud had better get away from this world and this revolution: but whoever wants to serve the revolution should know where it will lead him and must brace himself and be ready for anything." Yet even here one can feel a reluctance to face what the revolution would really be like, the violence it would actually require.

In practice, Bakunin, however eagerly he was awaiting the revolution, was immediately concerned with the long-term preparations for it. It is in this connection that he developed his ideas about the role of secret societies. He has been much derided for his love of conspiracy for its own sake, for his willingness, for example, to issue a membership card of the World Revolutionary Alliance number 2271, when the recipient seems to have been the only member of an organization Bakunin had that moment invented. For all the absurdity of some of his actions, his ideas about secret societies were not far removed from those of some later revolutionaries, including Lenin and Antonio Gramsci, about the role of the revolutionary party. "Strong in the idea behind them," Bakunin wrote, "expressing the very essence of popular instincts, desires and demands in their clear and conscious aims, among a crowd of people who would be struggling without any purpose or plan, these groups would finally have the strength of that close solidarity, which binds isolated groups in one organic whole, the strength of mind and energy of its members, who manage to create round themselves a circle of people who are more or less devoted to the same idea, and who are naturally subject to their influence. . . . They would be in a position . . . to lead the people towards the most complete realization of the socio-economic ideal and the organisation of the fullest popular freedom. This is what is called *the collective dictatorship* [the italics are Bakunin's own] of a secret organisation."

The basic problem for Bakunin as for many other anarchists was how to combine the strict discipline and strong organization needed to run revolutionary groups of this type with the freedom and spontaneity which the revolution must preserve at all costs. It was a problem of which Bakunin was well aware, even if he did not solve it. He saw the influence of the revolutionary party as being exercized, just as his own influence was, "exclusively through the natural, personal influence of its members, who have not the slightest power, are scattered in an unseen web throughout the regions, districts and communes." This "secret collective dictatorship" would continue after the revolution. Its members would remain unknown and unhonored, "solely and completely overwhelmed with the passion of liberty for all people. They must be people who would refuse personal

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historical importance during their lives and even a name in history after their death." These anonymous revolutionary leaders would be, as Bakunin wrote on another occasion, "like the waves of the sea, forever returning to the salutary level of equality," the product, it would seem, of some spontaneous natural process which would not require any prior planning or organization.

There are moments when the reader finds it hard to see what difference there is between Bakunin's "collective dictatorship" by an anonymous secret society and the kind of despotism which Bakunin criticises Marx for advocating, "the despotism of a governing minority, all the more dangerous because it appears as a sham expression of the people's will." Bakunin thought that the difference lay in that his dictatorship would not be exercised within the framework of the State, whereas the Marxist system demanded, at least as a temporary measure, the reinforcement of state power, with disastrous results: "In Herr Marx's People's State, so we are told," Bakunin wrote in 1872 after his final breach with Marx, "there will be no privileged class . . . so there will be no more class, but a government and, please note, an extremely complicated government which, not content with governing and administering the masses politically . . . will also administer them economically. . . . There will be a new class, a new hierarchy of real or bogus learning, and the world will be divided into a dominant, science-based minority and a vast ignorant majority. And then let the masses beware!"

Bakunin was stronger as a critic than as a constructive thinker and, while his attacks on Marx remain valid today, it is never quite clear how he himself envisaged that society would function after the revolution. In one of the most interesting documents in this selection, a draft, written in 1866, of the *Principles and Organisation of the International Brotherhood* (one of Bakunin's shortlived revolutionary societies), Bakunin raised the fundamental problems of anarchist political theory, but also revealed some of the contradictions in his own thought. The future society must be based on "absolute rejection of any principle of authority and of raison d'état." This will be achieved by the abolition of the centralized state machinery of government as well as of centralized educational, judicial and economic institutions. Each region will be organized on the basis of "the absolute freedom of individual, productive association and Commune." Freedom is to be unconditional, and the liberty of association even includes "those whose aim is the corruption and destruction of individual and public liberty."

How then is this new society to be protected against what, in the twentieth century, we would call a fascist counter-revolution? It is here that, as with earlier anarchists such as William Godwin and later ones such as Kropotkin, an essential naive optimism deriving directly from the 18th century Enlightenment takes over. "Psychology, statistics and the entire

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course of history prove that individual and social immorality have always been the necessary consequence of bad public and private education, of the absence and breakdown of public opinion. . . . In order to moralise present-day society, one must first embark on the outright destruction of that entire political and social organisation which is based upon inequality, privilege, divine authority and contempt for humanity." The result will be, it seems, a society governed by a properly educated public opinion, in which the threat of expulsion is the ultimate sanction and in which anyone who refuses to accept condemnation can declare "that he no longer wishes to be part of that society." But if he stays around, his fate will be a terrible one: he "shall be liable to robbery, ill-treatment and even death without any cause for alarm. Any person will be able to dispose of him like a dangerous animal. . . ." Perhaps, as in the political thought of Proudhon, there is still a beast lurking in the jungle of man's nature even when, with the removal of corrupting institutions, his true goodness should have revealed itself.

The picture of Bakunin which emerges from his writings is of a man of violent passions and prejudices, an intellectual who hates the intelligentsia, with at the same time an almost childlike optimism and faith in human nature. (He was described at the end of his life by an Italian friend as "a child, a barbarian, and a scholar all at once.") He is consistent in his hatreds, starting with God—"If God really existed, it would be necessary to abolish him"—and going on to the State—"Church and State are my two *bêtes noires*"—and to those revolutionaries "who, even before today's monarchic, aristocratic and bourgeois states are destroyed are already longing to create new revolutionary states just as centralist and despotic as those we already know." If he is less consistent in his positive ideals than in his hatreds, this is because—unlike, for example, William Godwin—he was not concerned with the creation of a detailed utopian vision of the future but rather with an attack on the present and with finding forms of immediate revolutionary action which would not prejudice the nature of post-revolutionary society.

This selection of his writings confirms, as Arthur Lehning has always maintained, that the publication of Bakunin's works would show that Bakunin is worth reading as a revolutionary social theorist as well as studying as a revolutionary personality. He will remain a critic whom Marxists will have to continue to answer, while liberals who share his concern for individual liberty will do well to study his ideas. They will perhaps feel a twinge of guilt when they see themselves through his eyes: "They never answer 'yes' or 'no'; they say 'To a certain extent you are right, but, yet . . .' and, if they have nothing left to say, they say: 'Yes, it is a curious thing.'" Yes, the lasting influence of Bakunin remains a curious thing.

James Joll

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HEGEL,—*hélas!*

REVOLUTION AND ROMANTICISM. By Howard Mumford Jones. Harvard University Press. $15.00.

SHELLEY: THE GOLDEN YEARS. By Kenneth Neill Cameron. Harvard University Press. $20.00.

NATURAL SUPERNATURALISM. By M.H. Abrams. W.W. Norton. $10.00.

POLITICS IN ENGLISH ROMANTIC POETRY. By Carl Woodring. Harvard University Press. $10.00.

In what seems to me the finest study of Wordsworth yet published, Geoffrey Hartman had occasion to remark, on his final page, that "political fears . . . are really imaginative fears." It was a comment that possessed a curious kind of ambiguity. For although the context of the remark suggested that Hartman meant it to apply only to Wordsworth's *own* political fears in his declining years, the very nature of Hartman's approach throughout *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* was to relegate the social and political aspects of experience entirely to the realm of personal consciousness: "My own work . . . attempt[s] to present a new and comprehensive view of Wordsworth's 'consciousness about consciousness.'"

Wordsworth's Poetry appeared in 1964 and marked a major advance in our ability to come to grips with some of the central problems posed by that loose, baggy term, "romanticism." And two years later, in a work of comparable brilliance (and a good deal more elegance), Richard Poirier made even clearer that a genuine revolution in methodology had taken place—at least for those readers who were capable of understanding it. "Let us . . . assume with Hegel," Poirier wrote in the opening pages of *A World Elsewhere*, "that 'freedom' is a creation not of political institutions but of consciousness, that freedom is that reality which the consciousness creates for itself."

Like most such revolutions in methodology, this one too was effected by the surest means yet devised to persuade: the demonstration, in the critical act itself, of a greater justice and precision than had hitherto been thought possible. (The larger question of the relationship of this revolution to the

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earlier work of Georges Poulet is a problem for another kind of review.) Thus Hartman's approach really did give us the grounds for experiencing a larger Wordsworth than we had known before; Poirier's analysis of certain key passages of American prose enlarged their significance in a fashion that can only be called revelatory. And different as the organization of each book was in almost every other respect, both did share a similar energizing discrimination at their center: a conception of literary art as a verbal process which could be defined most surely by the boundaries of individual consciousness. A peculiar kind of appropriateness resided, therefore, in the remark with which Harold Bloom opened his introduction to *Romanticism and Consciousness* in 1970—that "subjectivity or self-consciousness is the salient problem of Romanticism"—for the pronouncement bore all the assurance of a critical movement in the process of institutionalizing itself.

Coincidentally enough, however, in the same year that Bloom's collection of essays appeared, Carl Woodring was attempting to reopen a question that has always posed an implicit problem for the study of romanticism—the issue of the relationship during the period between political events and literary art. "The operative thesis of the present study," Woodring wrote in his introduction to *Politics in English Romantic Poetry*, "is that political concern is more important as a generative force and an argumentative presence in the romantic movement in England, and in major poems of that movement, than one could gather from most criticism of the last fifty years."

It was a contention composed—roughly—of two parts rhetoric, three parts sheer truth. For although the literature of English romanticism has never really lacked for political readings, Woodring's book does help to throw into clearer relief the methodological difficulty which has plagued the subject since at least the time of Francis Jeffrey's declaration in 1816 that "the revolution in our literature" was causally related to "the agitations of the French revolution."

The difficulty, of course (and it's one that few critics have really confronted), is to discover precisely how this apparent causal relationship can be demonstrated within the confines of responsible literary criticism. To paraphrase Bloom's pronouncement of 1970, the salient problem of romanticism is not so much self-consciousness *per se*, but rather the methodological difficulty of transcending the limitations that a conception of self-consciousness has imposed upon the criticism of romanticism. And to state the problem in this fashion is to indicate, I think, that the furthest reach of the literary criticism of romanticism in our own time has still been unable to pass beyond the philosophic exactitude (and idealized rationality) of an Hegelian construct.

Yet three of the four books under review scarcely reveal any awareness at

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all of the difficulties now residing in their chosen subjects. Carl Woodring, it is true, does refer to his intention to treat "poems as final, self-authenticating objects of study and admiration"—and who of us would want to quarrel with such an aim? But the nature of Woodring's cautious organization (in part suggested by the "in" of his title: politics *in* poetry) results, rather sadly, in a much smaller book than we might otherwise have hoped for.

I say "sadly" because there are so many things to respect in *Politics in English Romantic Poetry*: the vast amounts of exact scholarship, the isolated perceptions of real sensitivity, the general willingness to confront a very wide range of early nineteenth-century English literature on its own terms. Yet each of these virtues is diminished seriously by the absence of any real organizing vision. What might have been a genuinely exciting study, commensurate with the potential of its subject, becomes only one more serviceable volume in an ever-proliferating sea of specialized "topics."

Yet if *Politics in English Romantic Poetry* may be said to have attempted too little in terms of the learning it displays, Howard Mumford Jones's *Revolution and Romanticism* clearly has attempted too much. "This book is not for specialists," Jones announces in his preface—and that seems unexceptionable enough. Probably there have been far too many books for "specialists" in the past twenty years, and far too few of any real quality for a general audience. But when an author announces in 1974 that "the romantic *moi*" has been taken as "a central theme" in his attempt to work out the relations between revolution and romanticism, I think we're entitled as readers to form certain (unspecialized) expectations concerning the kind of intellectual sophistication necessary for the discourse. And, quite clearly, that kind of sophistication isn't there on any sustained level. Thus we read of Wordsworth's poetry at one point that "*The Prelude* is one of the great introspective triumphs of romanticism, a large part of it turning on the poet's varying attitude toward the French revolution"; and at another that "the Wordsworthian paradox is that one of the most subjective of romantic writers was throughout his life deeply concerned with public issues." Yet little of this kind of generalization carries much weight, for there really hasn't been a sufficiently informed attempt by Jones to confront the crux of the issue raised by his title: the problematic relationship between individual consciousness (particularly as we find it reflected in literary art) and the period's major social and political changes.

With Meyer Abrams' *Natural Supernaturalism*, however, we do have a book—the only one of the four under review, in fact—in which we can find a genuine awareness of the very large difficulties inherent in the subject. Moreover, Abrams' study has an organizing concept behind it which permits enormous masses of material to take on an illuminating interrelationship.

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"The title *Natural Supernaturalism*," Abrams writes in his preface, "indicates that my recurrent . . . concern will be with the secularization of inherited theological ideas and ways of thinking." Thus, more than midway through his study, Abrams is able to conclude, with the justified expectation that his reader has been carried along with him by the extensive and well-chosen illustrations, "Faith in an apocalypse by revelation had been replaced by faith in an apocalypse by revolution, and this now gave way to faith in an apocalypse by imagination or cognition. In the . . . frame of Romantic thought, the mind of man confronts the old heaven and earth and possesses within itself the power . . . to transform them into a new heaven and new earth, by means of a total revolution of consciousness."

Yet good as *Natural Supernaturalism* is in many ways—and in many ways it *is* the best intellectual treatment of its subject now in print—Abrams' book suffers finally from a basic lack of urgency. We aren't made to *feel*, through the analyses of scores of major texts, anything resembling the tension and high excitement that the texts and Abrams' argument might be expected to convey. Rather, what we encounter is an extraordinarily well informed, highly intelligent observer whose mode of discourse (unlike, say, Hartman's on Wordsworth) remains at too great a distance from his subject. Furthermore, it just may be that Abrams' organizing conception—*inherited* ways of thinking—commits his argument excessively to an elegiac attitude. In short, questions of "methodology" probably shouldn't be related (as they usually are) to abstract issues concerning a "system"; instead, they deserve more to be recognized as indexes of the relative fulness by which a writer has apprehended the potential of his subject.

Which leads me to the last of the books under review, Kenneth Neill Cameron's *Shelley: The Golden Years*. Unabashedly anti-formalistic, this is a book that puts to shame many of the smaller (and much more sophisticated) Shelleyan "studies" of the past ten or so years. Cameron really does believe in Shelley's greatness in a fashion which permits him to write of his subject—Shelley's life and works from 1814 to his death in 1822—with an extraordinary degree of assurance. Moreover, unlike Jones's book, Cameron's possesses a natural focus for the exploration of the interrelationship between literary art and political change: Shelley himself, a figure whom Cameron has been studying intensively for more than thirty years. The result is that *Shelley* adds a great deal to our understanding of the biographical, political, social, and intellectual context out of which Shelley's major poetry grew. Indeed, on the question of the "background" for Shelley, Cameron's book (along with his *Young Shelley* of 1950) is probably the best thing now available.

Nevertheless, there is a fundamental weakness about Cameron's approach, and I think it's one that helps to indicate still again the continuing

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difficulty of effectively relating the literature of romanticism to the political events of the period. For if Cameron is able to establish a much richer socio-political context for Shelley's poetry than other commentators have done, his attempts to confront the poetry itself result far too often in the thinness of merely analytic explication. Thus we find him writing at one point, "To unravel the symbolism of *The Triumph of Life* is by no means an easy task"; and at another, "The problem of interpretating *Prometheus Unbound* . . . is to find the meaning of the symbols"—neither of which assertions is likely to prove reassuring to most readers with a serious interest in poetry.

And perhaps in another comment of Cameron's—that Shelley "stands . . . about halfway between Godwin and Marx"—we encounter an implicit explanation for a good many of the difficulties reflected in these four books. For the comment reminds us (however much we'd like to forget it) how dramatically the nineteenth century ushered in that first great surge in the further division of intellectual energies which we now call the social sciences. Hence it really isn't of much use for our present problems of methodology to intone textbook cliches such as the one which declares that "Marx stood Hegel on his head"—or even to know enough about Godwin to realize that, in his curious blend of idealism and rationalism, he represents a briefly influential precursor in England of Hegelian philosophy. Rather, what we want is a criticism capable of reflecting that larger drama of romanticism which all our instincts continue to tell us must be there. "To redeem the word from the superstition of the word," Hartman remarked some years ago, "is to humanize it, to make it participate once more in a living concert of voices, and to raise exegesis to its former state by confronting art with experience as searchingly as if art were scripture." The tone of this, no doubt, is pitched too high; but the intensity of commitment Hartman implies is, it seems to me, pretty surely the direction the first wholly successful book on the subject of romanticism and revolution is going to have to follow.

William Walling

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WRITERS' CHOICE

EDITORS' NOTE: Writers' Choice *is a new department of short comments on old as well as new books that our contributors like particularly and want to call attention to.*

SARA BLACKBURN

Jose Lezama Lima, *Paradiso*. (Farrar, Straus.) Translated from the Spanish by Gregory Rabassa—beautiful, maddening sensual, formidable, reading it is like getting an injection of the life it magnifies.

Fay Weldon, *Female Friends*. (St. Martin's.) The funny and shattering novel about the lives of three 1920's-born women, by the neglected English author of *Down Among the Women*.

Flann O'Brien, *The Poor Mouth*. (Viking.) A vicious, hilarious take-off on the Irish. Not as funny as *At Swim-Two Birds* or *The Hard Life* (his previous novels), but hideously funny nevertheless for people who haven't read him before.

ADRIENNE RICH

Maps & Windows, by Jane Cooper. (Macmillan.) A collection from thirty years' work: earlier unpublished poems and newer ones, bridged by an autobiographical essay. "Nothing Has Been Used in the Manufacture of This Poetry That Could Have Been Used in the Manufacture of Bread" is an exploration of a woman poet's relationship to her work, by a poet of fifty whose integrity shapes every line she writes.

Ordinary Things, by Jean Valentine. (Farrar, Straus.) "I am the razor that has been put away, also/ the wrist in the photograph" . . . In this poem, and others in her third collection, Jean Valentine compresses and implodes images of survival, of a woman's life finding its level among the realities of children, violence, lovers, work, dreams. Valentine's work more than that of any contemporary poet reminds me, in its psychological intensity, of Emily Dickinson. A paperback edition is due in October.

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Through the Flower: My Struggle As A Woman Artist, by Judy Chicago. (Doubleday—54 pp. photographs.) A remarkable and original autobiography. Nowhere else so far have the problems of the woman painter been so lucidly explored, through personal narrative, the politics of art and sex, the history of female aesthetics. But the book is important also for the future of education; it examines the woman teacher/woman student relationship, the imagery and skills and self-knowledge that can develop in a women's studio, the reasons why she embarked on such teaching and its future possibilities. Above all, this is the narrative of an important artist coming into her own.

ROBERT COLES

Red River to Appomattox, Shelby Foote's third volume in his history of the Civil War: *The Civil War: A Narrative* (Random House.) He is a novelist who writes clear, incisive, analytical (not with the "psycho" attached) history. His interest in psychology is sensitively worked into the narrative—no overwrought, flashy theories of "motivation," "personality" and what have you.

MARGE PIERCY

Science Walks On Two Legs, by Science for the People. (Avon. Original paperback.) This is the account of a trip to China by members of the organization Science for the People. It is uncommonly interesting and contains a lot of observations about an entirely different way of doing science that emphasizes human usefulness.

The Jane Poems, by Kathleen Spivack. (Doubleday.) Kathleen Spivack's second book is stunning. The poems are close to native oral blues and ballads without being in any way imitative.

Voices From Wounded Knee 1973. (Akwesasne Notes.) A beautiful collection of photographs, documents, interviews, chronology, from Wounded Knee. These make a vividly human account, much of it in the words of the people involved.

New Days, by June Jordan. (Emerson Hall Publishers, Inc.) June Jordan has come into the maturity of a rich and many voiced talent, subtle, powerful, and lyrical. Very strong collection.

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Daughter of Earth, by Agnes Smedley. (Feminist Press.) This is a reprint of an autobiographical novel that originally came out in 1929. It is about the high cost of becoming a full, educated, and political human being when you are born a woman in a dirt poor farming and mining family. Unusually, in fact painfully, honest for a political autobiography.

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NOTES

RONALD SUKENICK's **98.6**, the novel from which "Palestine" is taken, will be published by the Fiction Collective in April. . . . **LEONARD MICHAELS'** new novel, **I Would Have Saved Them if I Could**, will be published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux in May. Meanwhile, he is growing a moustache. . . . **ROBERT BLY** writes a column for **The American Poetry Review**. . . . **Two Citizens** is **JAMES WRIGHT**'s latest book. . . . **JOHN ASHBERY** is a member of the creative writing faculty at Brooklyn College. His new collection of poems, **Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror**, is coming from Viking in May. . . . **MEI BERSSENBRUGGE** was born in Peking and grew up in New England. Her first book **Summits Move with the Tide**, was put out by the Greenfield Review Press in 1974. . . . Currently on leave of absence from teaching, **ARTHUR E. SMITH** is conducting poetry workshops for grammar school children and completing a volume of poems. . . . **ROBERT K. MARTIN** lives in Montreal, where he teaches at Concordia University. . . . **LEONARD KRIEGEL** is at the City College of New York. "Going Home" is the first chapter of a book in progress entitled **Last Stop on the D Train**. . . . **NEIL SCHMITZ** is teaching this year at the University of Sussex in the American Studies program. . . . **PHILIP STEVICK** teaches at Temple University and lives in Bucks County. . . . **GEORGE STADE** tells us that the most harrowing thing to happen to him recently is that he moved. . . . **JAMES JOLL** is Stevenson Professor of International History at the London School of Economics. A revised edition of his **The Second International**, first published twenty years ago, appeared in 1975. . . . **WILLIAM WALLING** is working on something he intends to call **The Second Trumpet: The French Revolution and English Romanticism**. . . . **NORMAN MAILER**'s preface to **The Joker** was recently published in a new edition of Jean Malaquais' novel, and though it is not our usual policy to reprint work, we agree with Mr. Mailer that there are special reasons for running his piece. In addition to the particular interest of the preface, the book has received so little notice that few of our readers are likely to have read it. . . .

The poems in this issue were selected by Paul Zweig.

We are sorry that Richard Locke's name was mistakenly left off the list of the Rockefeller Conference participants which appeared in Issue #4, 1974.

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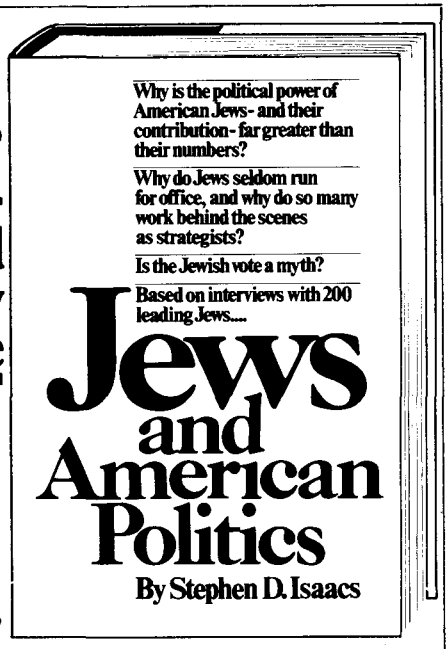
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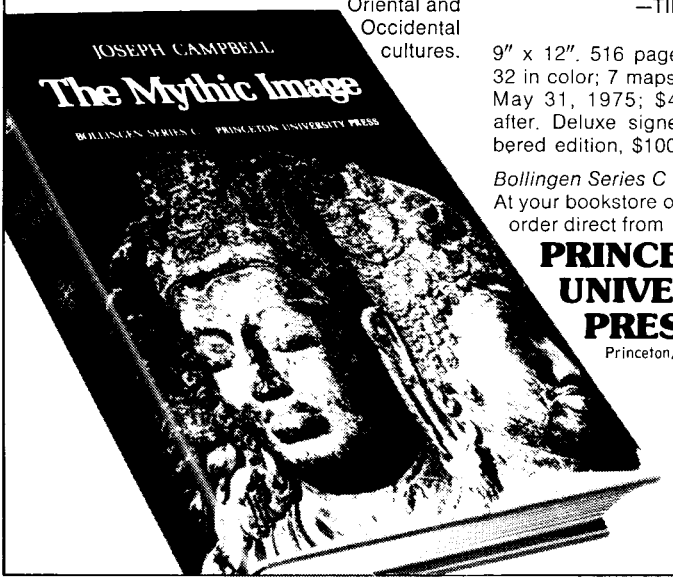

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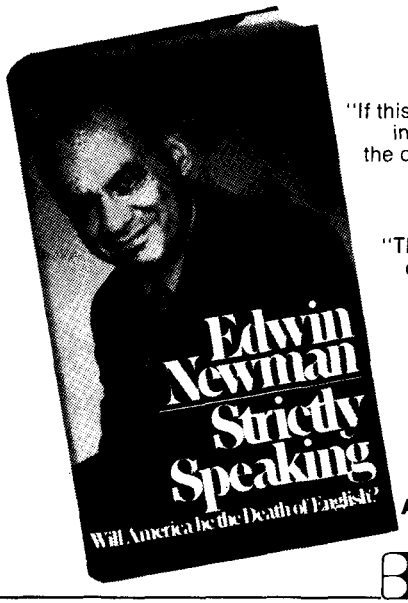

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